THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

ANUARY

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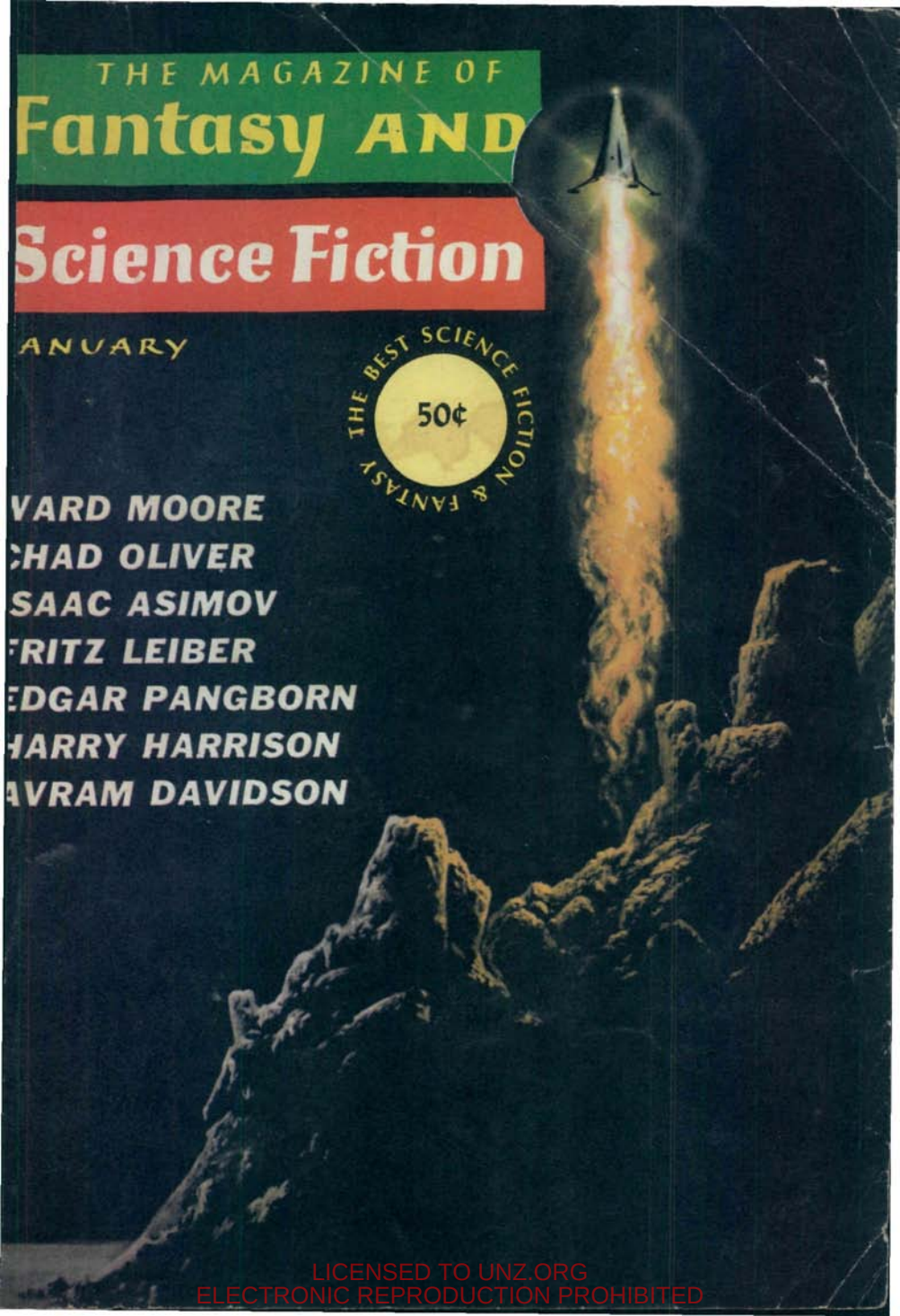

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

JANUARY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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The meaty SF drama below marks Chad Oliver's welcome return to these pages. (His last story here was THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY, May 1959.) Here he pictures a City of the future—where the issues are no longer smoke, noise, traffic, stress, or crowds. All that has passed. Man the city dweller is faced with only one problem—extinction . . .

END OF THE LINE

by Chad Oliver

THE CITY WAS BEHIND HIM now.

Earl Stuart did not look back. He could feel the glow of the City on the horizon but he shut his mind to it. He drank in the night air, tasting the smells of the living earth. He looked up at the warm stars like a man released from prison. The rifle in his hand glinted in the starlight.

He hated the tunnel. It was the only way out, of course, but he had never gotten used to it. It was like descending into an ancient grave. It was worse than the City; it was an older death. It took an eternity to get through the tunnel. A man had too much time to think. And some night, he knew, the security men would be waiting for him when he came out of the tunnel.

And then—

"Damn it, Earl," Doc said. "Slow down, can't you? How much further is it to those sleds?"

"Couple of miles." Earl Stuart kept the same pace. "If we get caught out here in the open you'll have more than sore legs to worry about."

Dr. Ochoa almost broke into a run to catch him. He grabbed his arm. "It's not me, Earl. It's the mothers. They can't keep up."

"They knew what they were getting into. Nobody forced them to come out here."

"We need them. What good will it do if we get to the sleds and then have to go back to look for them? You've proved your point. You're big and strong, a real throwback. We're impressed. The girls will fight to get the first shot at you if they've got any strength left when we stop. So what? Take it easy or this is going to be a one-man expedition."

Reluctantly, Earl Stuart slowed

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down a little. He liked to walk, to use his body, to move fast without the aid of machines. He felt as though he were leading a pack of invalids. But Doc was right. They had to stick together.

"Okay," he said. "Drop back and tell them it won't be long now. Another hour ought to do it. Pass out some pills, Doc, and take a couple yourself."

"Go to hell," Doc Ochoa said, panting.

"I've been there," Earl said. He walked more quickly for a moment, separating himself from the expedition he led.

He liked to walk alone out here. Sometimes, when the City got on his nerves, he slipped through the tunnel by himself. He knew the danger, accepted it, relished it. He found a strange kind of peace outside, an inner peace, a cure for the restless hunger that gnawed at him.

He belonged outside. He felt at home here. He could envy the savages, even when he gunned them down. Stinking, dirty, bug-ridden, wild-eyed brutes—but by God if he had a choice—

He had no choice, of course.

They would tear him to pieces if they ever got their hands on him. More than one expedition had never made it back. He had seen what had happened that time last summer. Fourteen men and five women. He wouldn't forget it in a hurry. They had all been eaten.

The savages were always hungry.

There wasn't much meat around.

There wasn't much of *anything* around. Maybe that was what he liked about it. Just empty savannah country, gently rolling, with lots of grass and a few young trees. The sky was bigger out here, bigger and somehow closer. A great vault of burning stars at night, a living blue vastness by day, a blue that came right down and touched you, a blue that was big enough to hold a sea of clouds and a sun that seared the naked skin.

Once, he knew, there had been other cities here. He had seen what was left of them. The domes were gone, but some of the buildings were still standing: silent, desolate, pock-marked with holes where strange birds nested. . . .

He did not miss the cities, and they were no mystery to him.

Everyone knew the stories, but only the historians could keep the details straight. It hadn't been a war, really. Just too many missiles, too many bombs, too many fingers on too many buttons. Nobody remembered what the arguments were all about. Nobody cared.

There weren't very many cities left, anywhere.

There weren't any bombs. That was over and done with.

Earl Stuart put it all out of his mind.

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He had a job to do. It was a forbidden job, against every law of the City. He didn't care about the law. He believed in what he was doing.

And there was money in it. Good money.

He wasn't doing it for the money. Probably none of them were, at least not for the money alone. But the money was nice, if you didn't get caught.

If you got caught, all the money in the world didn't help.

It was long after midnight when they reached the hidden sleds. Earl Stuart gave them no time to rest. They could sleep when the sun came up and it was too dangerous to move.

Right now, he wanted to get out of there.

He supervised the loading of the sleds. Ten men with rifles, including Doc Ochoa and himself. Six mothers, their young faces drawn in the starlight. Four sleds, already loaded with the few supplies they would need.

Nobody said much. They were too tired, too uneasy.

Most people didn't like it much outside.

Earl Stuart took the lead sled. He had two men and two mothers with him.

The sled lifted gently under his practiced hand. He kept it low, almost skimming the tops of the trees. He showed no lights. The sled was completely silent. He could hear the moan of the air as the sled cut through it.

He smiled a little, ready for what was coming.

The City faded behind him.

Ahead of him, lost in the night, the other world waited.

Helen Sanderson could not sleep. She had taken one pill and it had worked for a few hours. Now she was awake again and she did not want another pill. She was fuzzy but her mind was racing.

Had she forgotten anything?

She still had plenty of time, of course.

It couldn't be tomorrow; that was too soon. Not the next day, either, or the next. Maybe not at all.

No. Don't think about that.

This time she would get one.

All that money—

"Honey," she said. "Are you awake?"

Larry Sanderson, who obviously had been asleep unless he had developed the habit of snoring to render his insomnia more palatable, rolled over and grunted. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Helen said.

"Swell." Larry buried his face in the pillow.

"Honey, I can't sleep."

"Take a pill," muttered the muffled voice.

"I took a pill. I've been thinking about Bobby."

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Larry Sanderson woke up for good and sat up in bed. "Don't torture yourself. That was five years ago, Helen. You can't go on thinking about him forever."

"I can't stop thinking about him. I *want* to remember him."

Larry took Helen's tense body in his arms. She felt cold, cold and rigid. He shuddered a little. That was the way Bobby had felt that last time. "Of course you want to remember him, darling. I didn't mean that we should forget him. But you can't go on like this. If you would go back to the doctor—"

Helen began to cry. He could taste the salty tears that ran down her cheeks. "I don't want a doctor. I want a baby. I want a baby!"

"We're doing everything we can." Larry's tone was reasonable. He knew that was the wrong approach but he wasn't up to another scene. "You've got to be patient."

"Patient!" Her body shook with sobs. "I'm forty years old, Larry! I can't be patient. I don't want to be patient. I want my Bobby, I want a baby. . . ."

He kissed her neck, stroking her with his hand. "Do you want me to make love to you?"

She pulled away, her body as cold as ice. "That's no good. You know it isn't any good. I want a *baby*."

Larry sighed. "According to reliable reports—"

She got out of bed. Her hair was wild, her fists clenched tightly. "You know I won't get pregnant again I don't care what they say. It's all lies! You know it's nothing but lies."

"Come back to bed, Helen."

"No."

"Do you want me to stay up with you?"

"No. I don't care. Go back to sleep."

Larry punched his pillow and rammed his head back into it. "Thanks for a lovely evening."

Helen walked over and touched his shoulder. "I'm sorry, honey."

"I'm sorry too. But you won't have to wait forever. You're one of the lucky ones."

"Yes, I'm one of the lucky ones."

"Take a pill, won't you?"

"I will. Later. Go back to sleep. I'm sorry I woke you up."

"Okay. Good night."

"Good night," she said. The conventional words were stale and bitter in her mouth.

She walked out of the bedroom. Her gown was thin but there was no need for a robe or slippers. The apartment was always the same temperature and the floor was self-cleaning. She walked from room to room. It took her a long time.

They had plenty of space in the apartment. They could have all the space they wanted. . . .

There were no windows, of course. She thought of activating

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the wall screens. She had picked out the pictures so carefully, once. The translucent green of the undersea lagoon, with the real fish darting in streaks of color around the coral reef. The wind-swept mountain where the white snow drifted down like soft feathers above the dark line of the trees. The shifting reds and oranges and yellows of the Martian sands. . . .

Briefly, she wondered what the real sea looked like. It was a strange thought. She had seen it countless times on television. It had surrounded her in the dome of their television room, she had heard the surf breaking in foamy rolls against the empty beach, she had seen the long-beaked birds dive into the water after fish. She had seen it all.

Helen Sanderson had never been out of the City.

Her legs carried her to where she had to go, to Bobby's room.

Nothing had changed there. She had left everything exactly the way it had been, despite what the doctor had told her. The little bed with the blue cover was neatly made, waiting. The soft brown bear, eyes shut now, was sitting next to the pillow. The dresser with the smiling clown had not faded. The toys were all in their places.

Poor Bobby, she thought. Her eyes were dry now; she felt calmer. Poor little Bobby. He had only lived for two years. He hadn't played much with his toys. Bobby had been sick almost from the start, sick like all the rest of them, sick and quiet and muddy-eyed. It had been hard to get his attention, hard to get him to play or to laugh or even to smile.

Still, she had had a child. And he had lived for two years. Bobby had been theirs for two years.

And now, perhaps. . . .

Larry was right. She had been one of the lucky ones.

There was no need to cry, not any longer.

She did not want another pill.

She wanted to stay right where she was. She wanted to be awake, savoring her knowledge.

Helen Sanderson sat down on the little bed in the silent twenty-room apartment. She put her head in her hands and stared at nothing, nothing at all.

In what was almost the exact center of the City, a door scanned Alex Norfolk and opened immediately. The door did not open for many people. Alex Norfolk stepped into the brightly-lit room first, but then he waited for Randall Wade to catch up with him.

Owen Meissner, the commander of the City's security forces, yanked his feet off his desk and stood up. He looked surprised for a fleeting moment but he recovered himself quickly. Alex Norfolk had a habit of dropping in when a man least expected him.

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He had been doing it a lot lately.

"Sit down, Owen," Alex said.

Owen Meissner sat down.

Alex Norfolk pulled a chair up to the desk and seated himself. Randall Wade waited until Alex was settled and then he sat down. Alex fished out his pipe, filled it with great deliberation, and puffed on it until it lit.

"Damned tobacco's no good," he announced. "I'd sooner smoke grass if I could get out to get any."

He said nothing else. The office filled with smoke and silence in about equal proportions. Alex Norfolk's long, lanky body was completely relaxed in the chair. He might have been asleep except for the alert brown eyes under his heavy brows.

"Well," Owen Meissner said finally. "Is this a social call, or what?"

"When a man is a hundred years old," Alex Norfolk said, "he makes damned few social calls. This isn't one of them."

"Okay. Business, then. What can I do for you?"

"You can't do anything for me. For the rest, you can do your job." Alex blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

Owen Meissner flushed. "Look here, Alex—"

The old man, who didn't look a day older than Randall Wade, who was fifty-five, did as he was told. He looked at Owen Meissner, hard.

The silence came again.

This time, Randall Wade broke it. "No need to get excited, Owen." His voice was strong and controlled. He was one of those men who do not stand out in a group until they act. Once they take action, they inspire confidence. Owen Meissner turned his attention to him. If Randall Wade didn't have anything on the ball he wouldn't have been the heir apparent to Alex Norfolk. Alex didn't make many mistakes about men—or about anything else for that matter.

"Let's begin again," Owen said. "What's up?"

"That's what we thought you might be able to tell us," Randall Wade said. He smiled. "You're the policeman."

"You're talking in riddles, Randy. You've been around the old man too long."

"Maybe. I'll try to be more specific. What are your men working on?"

"Now?"

"Now."

Owen Meissner considered. "Nothing much that would be of interest to you."

"Try us. We're interested in lots of things."

"Well, we've got a murder on our hands. Happened last night, but we've kept it out of the news for the present. One of the fringe cults, a little more violent than the rest. You know how it is."

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"Sex killing?"

"Yes. Not the usual sort of thing, though. I don't think the girl was supposed to die. Things just got out of hand, as far as we know. Regular cult meeting—the girl was chained up and tortured, and she just conked out. The men were all masked; they call themselves Fathers. We know who was there, but we can't find out which one did the actual killing. We'll get him, though."

"So what?" asked Alex Norfolk.

"So what?" Owen Meissner looked shocked, and he did not shock easily. "You're always talking about population. If someone is murdered, that's one less person. If we get the man who did it, we can have him treated and he won't kill again. That's so what."

"Your logic is flawless." The old man puffed on his pipe. "How many of those cults—to use your own term—are operating in the City?"

"Maybe fifty."

"Those are just the public ones?"

"Yes. We don't have any control over what goes on in a man's own home."

"I am familiar with the law, Owen. What causes those cults?"

"Well, you know what the psychologists say. It's a time of stress between the sexes. The men blame the women, the women blame the men. It's only natural that some of them—"

"Exactly. So if you catch this one man, this one poor fool with his knife or whip or whatever it was, what have you solved?"

"I've solved a killing. That's my job, isn't it? I don't pretend to deal with final causes. That's *your* job."

"Yes. That's my job."

Alex Norfolk sat back in his chair and closed his eyes. His pipe went out and he did not refill it.

"What else, Owen?" asked Randall Wade.

"I don't have any rabbits to pull out of my hat. There was a raid on Lab Four, but it was a pretty sloppy job. They didn't get anywhere near the embryo tanks. You know all about that, of course."

"We know about that."

"There was a report of a liner flying too low over the restricted area—Section 31, it was—on a flight from the City to New Rome. Air Control has checked it out, and there's nothing to it."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"What do you know about a man named Earl Stuart?"

Owen Meissner looked blank. "I don't think I've ever heard the name."

"Check his record, will you?"

Meissner pulled out a panel in his desk and rapidly punched out his instructions. In thirty seconds a wall screen blinked on. The data on Earl Stuart weren't very star-

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tling. He had been born in the City twenty-eight years ago. His father, Graham Stuart, had made a lot of money in electronics. That was fairly unusual; it was hard to make money in a shrinking economy. Both Graham Stuart and his wife were dead now. Earl, of course, had been an only child, and he had inherited a small fortune. He didn't have to work. He was more of a playboy than anything else. He knew how to swim, which was curious, and he was interested in guns. He had been absent from his apartment for periods longer than a week on a number of different occasions. He had no known sexual peculiarities. He had never been arrested. He had been attended by doctors only twice in his life, once for a broken arm and once for measles.

His picture was somewhat more interesting. Earl Stuart was a big man, an even six feet, and he was solidly built. His hair was jet black and cut very short. His cheekbones were high and flaring, his nose strong and a trifle broad, his mouth firm but full-lipped. His eyes were very dark, almost black. His skin was either swarthy or—possibly—tanned. Earl Stuart would have looked tough and capable at any period of history. Now, in the City, he looked almost freakish.

"Well?" said Owen Meissner.

"Two things," Randall Wade said. "First, I want a complete check on that man's birth. I want a record of Mrs. Stuart's pregnancy, and I want the name of the attending physician."

"He wasn't adopted," Meissner said. "The Lab report would be on there if he wasn't. Mrs. Stuart's natural child."

"Check it out. Second, I want the exact dates of Earl Stuart's absences from his apartment during the past five years. I want to know where he was and what he was doing."

"That won't be easy."

"Do it anyway."

Alex Norfolk opened his eyes and smiled. Randy was doing very well. That was important, very important.

"Do you mind telling me what this is all about?" Meissner asked. "What's this man done?"

Randall Wade stood up. "One of our computers has put the finger on him. There's a very high degree of probability that Earl Stuart has been leading expeditions outside the City. We want to know how he's getting out without detection. We want to know what he's doing out there. We want him stopped."

"I'll do what I can."

Alex Norfolk slowly refilled his pipe, got it going, and uncoiled to stand beside Randall Wade. "That's not good enough, Owen. This is important. I want every available man on Earl Stuart, starting right now."

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"I've got a murder on my hands. I can't just—"

"To hell with your murder. I want Earl Stuart, and I want him wrapped up with no loose ends. Get him."

"That's an order?"

"What does it sound like? Casual conversation?"

"Okay. We'll get him if he's the man you think he is."

"He's the man."

Alex Norfolk walked out through the door again without saying goodbye. Randall Wade hesitated. "Easy does it, Owen," he said. "So long."

Owen Meissner stood up, nodded, and attempted a smile. As soon as the door slid shut behind the two men he sank back into his chair. The smile vanished. He jabbed a red button on his desk.

When they were settled in their tube car, Randall Wade turned to the old man. "You were pretty rough on him, Alex."

"He needs someone to build a fire under him."

"He's a good cop. He'll get Stuart."

"He has no imagination. He can do what he's told to do and handle routine cases. Is that good enough, Randy?"

"You're not being fair."

"I haven't got time to be fair."

"You can't expect a man to work in the dark. Owen doesn't understand why men like Stuart are so dangerous. You've either got to fill him in more completely or you've got to expect less of him."

"Your alternatives are impossible. I can't tell Owen Meissner what is really going on. He's not built that way. He'd fight it all the way, and in his position he could be deadly. And I've got to expect more from him, not less. If these expeditions get out of control, we're finished."

"You need another solution, then."

"*You* need another solution. I'm not going to be here forever, despite all the jokes. What are you going to do about it?"

Randall Wade considered. "I want to be fair. Meissner is okay as far as he goes."

"He doesn't go far enough."

"Try this, then. We've still got a few capable younger men at the Institute. Let's take one of them—maybe Hashimoto from biology, he's still young enough—and train him in police work. We can create a new position—Commissioner of Security, or something like that—and put Hashimoto in over Meissner. Owen can handle all the routine stuff, and Hashy can keep tabs on threats like Stuart. We can arrange it so that Owen won't lose any status."

"That will take some doing."

"I can do it if I have to."

"Okay. I like it, Randy. Go ahead."

"You agree on Hashimoto?"

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"You're the one who will have to work with him."

Randall Wade had made up his mind. "I'll go talk to him right now."

"Fine. Drop me off at the Archives, will you?"

"Shouldn't you be getting some rest?"

"Damn it, I'm not an invalid. I'll rest when I get tired."

"You're the boss, Alex."

The tube car pulled up at the Archives. "Good night, Randy."

"See you tomorrow, sir."

"Don't bet on it. And don't call me sir."

The tube car pulled away. Alex Norfolk looked after it fondly for a moment. "Thanks, Randy," he said quietly.

The old man was alone.

He walked into the Archives.

The building that housed the Archives was unlike any other in the City. On the outside it looked conventional enough, and the outside was all that most people ever got to see. On the inside it was radically different.

The structure was actually a hollow shell, a tall casing unbroken by floor levels. Rising from the bottom, concealed by the outer walls, was a solid tower of shining metal. The tower was one hundred feet high and it was sunk into the earth another hundred feet below ground level.

The tower was built to last.

It would be there long after the outer building had crumbled to dust.

There was nothing in the tower.

For a long minute, Alex Norfolk stood and looked at the shining column. He had seen it many times, but it was so much a part of his life that he seldom stopped to examine it. The tower had been built before Alex had been born.

He looked at it now, conscious of the fact that he might never see it again. He tried to picture it as it would one day be—a bright finger of metal standing under an open sky. It would know the rain and the winds and the cold and the sun, but it would endure. It had to endure. Surely, when the time came, it would not be overlooked. It would be Stonehenge and the pyramids and Easter Island, and it would draw the curious. The Archives—he hated that name, but those who came late into the world were stuck with the names that existed—would be opened. In time, they would be read.

And then—

Well, then they would know as much as he did.

It wasn't much. It wasn't enough. But added to what they themselves had been able to find out, it might be something. It might chart a few dead ends. It might make a difference.

Alex Norfolk sighed. Physically, he did not feel old. Mentally he felt as sharp as ever, although

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he supposed that most old men deluded themselves that way. But spiritually—there was no other word for it—he was tired. The years had piled up on him.

If only he could be sure—

He straightened. Self pity was a sure sign of senility. The hell with it. He would do what he had to do. Then, if his courage did not fail him, he would do what he wanted to do.

He started down the tunnel that led to the Archives. There were no steps, but the tunnel had a gentle slope. It was meant to be easy, easy to find and easy to descend.

His thoughts turned to Earl Stuart. He would have liked to have known that man. Almost, he could wish him well. Was it possible that Earl Stuart did not know who he was?

Alex Norfolk shook his head and walked on under the earth.

The sleds landed just as dawn began to streak the eastern sky with flame.

Earl Stuart stepped out, his rifle at the ready. "Let's go," he said. "They can't be more than a couple of miles away."

Doc Ochoa fingered the stubble of beard on his face. "The mothers are pretty tired, Earl. They haven't had much sleep the past two days."

"Next time they'll know better, Doc. Pass out some more pills for anyone who wants them. If they get wind of us we may be chasing around out here for weeks. I know where they are. If we hurry we can catch them in the caves before they wake up. I'm moving out right now and I'm taking my men with me. If the girls want to wait here alone, that's their problem."

"You're one sweet guy, Earl."

"That's what they tell me."

Earl Stuart turned on his heel and started off. He did not look back to see if the others were following him but he set a slow pace. They could keep up with a little effort and he knew from experience that they would. It was strictly follow the leader, and he was the only leader the expedition had. He had made certain of that.

The light was tricky but he could see all that he had to see. They were on a downgrade, a grassy plain that sloped away toward a small stream. On the far side of the stream, he knew, the land rose sharply. There was a jagged line of cliffs, and the caves were in the cliffs.

There wouldn't be any trouble until they got on the other side of the stream.

He tested the wind. It was fresh and clean and smelled of flowers and night-damp soil. More importantly, the wind was in his face. The savages couldn't smell them coming.

He felt good, really good. He had to hold himself in check to

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keep from breaking into a trot. He was alive, fully alive. He was eager and excited, ready for anything. It wasn't just the killing. It was being outside with the wind in his face, it was being in command, it was his responsibility for his own actions. In the City, he was like a fish in a bottle. Out here, he felt like a man.

It was a good feeling.

Earl Stuart was not stupid and he was not amoral. He had thought the thing through. He knew what he was doing. It was against the law, but he was convinced that the law was insane. No one had to tell him that the City was dying, rotting like fallen fruit in the sun. He had eyes. He knew the score. The City needed some blood.

He was going after it.

He was no hero. He didn't kid himself that he was doing it for the City. He didn't give a damn about the City. He *wanted* to be out here. He liked what he was doing.

Still, it was pleasant to know that you were right.

And the money came in handy. His inheritance had been ample, but only a fool lived on his capital. His investments weren't paying off as they would have done in the old days.

In the City, Earl Stuart had expensive tastes.

When he reached the stream, the sun was just lifting over the horizon behind him. It was a great red ball and it threw long shadows. A few of the field birds began to sing. Something big stirred in the grass over to his right. The stream chuckled along in its banks. The water was very clear; he could see the shadowed fish on the bottom.

He did not hesitate. He knew that if he gave them time to think about it he would have trouble getting the mothers into the water. He walked across briskly. The water was cold but not deep. It barely came up to his knees.

He kept on going, more slowly now. He could see the cliffs ahead of him. The face of the cliffs was splashed with sunlight. The caves were black holes, like eyes.

He saw no movement.

They were coming right out of the sun. They would be hard to spot. The men had all been with him before. They knew what to do.

If only the mothers—

One of the girls screamed. It was choked off at once as one of the men grabbed her and covered her mouth. But it had been loud, loud—

Earl spun around. He saw him, running through the grass. A man, half naked, long hair streaming in the wind. He carried nothing but a fish fork. He opened his mouth to shout an alarm.

Earl shot him, neatly, through the ear. The flat crack of the rifle shocked the morning air.

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"Down," Earl said.

He crawled back through the grass to the mother who had screamed. She was still being held. He looked at her. Her eyes were wide and she was trembling violently.

He put the muzzle of his rifle against her chest, hard.

"Let her go," he said.

The man released her. She stared up at him, frozen.

"He's dead, he can't hurt you. Do you understand me?"

The mother nodded.

"If you do that again, I'll blow a hole through you. Do you understand that?"

She nodded again.

"Tell me you understand."

"I understand." Her voice was faint.

He took the rifle away. "Okay, honey. For God's sake, get a hold on yourself. I know it's hard the first time you see one. After the fight starts, you scream all you want to. Right now, you keep your mouth shut. Deal?"

She shuddered. "I'm sorry. He was just so—"

He smiled. "That was one of the pretty ones," he said.

He left her. He crawled forward and lifted his head out of the tall grass. The cliffs looked the same as before. The caves stared at him blankly. There was no sign of life.

"Well?" Doc asked. "What do we do now?"

"Think they heard us?"

"I don't know."

"I don't know either. The wind is in our favor; it's blowing away from the caves. We've got maybe a fifty-fifty chance that our friends are still asleep in there. This particular bunch may never have heard a rifle before anyhow. I've looked them over with a scanner but I've never been in here before. I just don't know."

"It's your decision. You make it."

Earl took a minute to decide. A mistake now could be costly. The sun was climbing rapidly in the eastern sky, flooding the world with light. They would lose their shadows soon.

"I don't like fifty-fifty odds," he said finally. "If they're ready for us it could get rough. They can hole up in there and we might never get them out. If we go in after them we're going to get some bloody noses. Damn that woman!"

"Don't forget our insomniac fisherman. If he hadn't been out here. . . ."

"He was. We can't change that. There's only one thing we can change, and that's our plan."

"You mean try again somewhere else?"

"No. We've been away too long as it is. This was our objective. We'll stick to it."

"You just said—"

Earl cut him off. "You've been in caves like that with me. You

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know what they're like. Those savages have been using them for generations. There are bound to be connecting passages between them, and there's always a back way out. It must be up there on top of the cliffs somewhere, up on that plateau. You follow me?"

"If you're suggesting that we crawl in through the back door, you've just lost your doctor. I'm not going in there."

"None of us are going in there. Get the fuzz out of your brain, Doc. That's where they come *out.*"

"Why do they do that? Just to be agreeable?"

"Do I have to draw you a picture? If some of us attack from the front and dump enough slugs into those caves, they'll try to get the women and the kids out. They always do. When they come out up on top, the rest of us will be waiting for them."

"I don't like it, Earl. We've got to stick together. There aren't enough of us to play army."

"We've got ten men. That's five to stay here with the mothers and four to come with me. It's the only way."

"It's the only way to get eaten alive. There are too many of them—"

Earl Stuart smiled. "We've got the rifles, remember?"

"That's what General Custer said."

Earl controlled his temper with difficulty. Doc's historical allusions always annoyed him. He didn't care what some Greek general had said. He had wasted too much time already.

"I'll divide up the men. I'll take four with me and go back for a sled. You'll stay here with four men and the mothers. Keep your heads down, understand? When we're ready up on top I'll set off a flare. Then you move up and start shooting. Got that?"

"I still don't like it."

"You don't have to like it. Just do it."

Earl moved quickly, picking the four fastest men.

"Let's go," he said.

It took him a little more than half an hour to reach the sleds. He had made no effort at concealment, trotting all the way. If they had been seen leaving, so much the better. The savages couldn't know how many of them there were. They would stay put for awhile.

He was covered with sweat. It was going to be a hot day and he wasn't used to moving around in the direct sunlight. He gave his men a breather and they all loaded up on water.

"Don't drink too much," he said finally. "It will slow you down. Everyone ready?"

The four men nodded. They looked tired and nervous but they would settle down when the shooting started. They were good men as men went these days.

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"Okay. One sled. No talking after we land. I don't want any stupid shooting. Pick your targets and make sure before you fire. Let the men and the older children go as long as they're just trying to get away. Don't shoot any more than you have to. When you do shoot, aim for the women with kids and *don't miss*. Head shots are best. Those women are murder when they're wounded. Any questions?"

There were no questions.

Earl took the controls and the sled lifted silently into the warm morning air. He kept it low, moving in a circular pattern that would bring him over the plateau from behind. The sky was blue and cloudless; visibility was perfect. Even at the sled's speed he saw two small herds of grazing animals. The game was coming back. . . .

He had no trouble at all. He took the sled up when he got over the plateau. He hovered a moment, looking down. He could see Doc and the others waiting in the grass. He could see the little stream, sparkling like a ribbon of glass. He spotted the back exit to the caves in less than a minute. It was concealed by boulders and brush at ground level but it was nakedly exposed from the air.

He landed the sled and deployed his men. It was very hot now. The sun was burning his skin.

He fired off his flare. It burned a red streak into the sky and popped into a miniature, drifting sun. He swung his rifle into position and waited.

The shooting started at once. The shots sounded small and lost in the dying wind. They wouldn't be doing much damage, not at that range. But Doc would be moving up quickly now. High caliber rifle fire at a hundred yards or so ought to sting a hide or two in the caves. The slugs would ricochet against those rocks. . . .

Earl's finger curled around the trigger. He liked rifles; rifles were good and solid and reliable. Bullets were more selective than rays and beams, and against savages armed with spears there was no need for fancy equipment.

He felt a pleasant excitement that tightened his belly. It was always like this. It wasn't exactly a joy in killing, a taste for slaughter. It was at once simpler and more complex than that.

It was the thrill of the hunt.

There was nothing like it.

He waited, listening as the shots moved closer. Doc was really pouring it in now.

Soon, soon—

Now!

A man ran out of the exit hole. He was old and bent, his long hair a dirty gray. A filthy animal skin was draped around his skinny waist. His mouth was open, show-

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ing his stained and broken teeth. He was so close Earl could smell the rancid grease in his hair and the sweat on his body.

Earl held his fire.

A second man stumbled out, a younger man this time. He had been hit in the right shoulder. His whole right side was dark with blood. He carried his stone-tipped spear in his left hand. His eyes were hurt and wild. He fell, picked himself up, and staggered away.

Earl let him go. He wouldn't last long anyway. As long as they didn't see his men stationed behind the rocks it would be foolish to fire before he had a target. It would just drive the rest of them back into the caves and that was the last thing he wanted.

The children came next, pouring out of the hole like silent, scurrying rats. They were naked, all of them, naked and splotched with body sores. Children, so many children! There must have been fifty of them. Earl doubted that there were that many half-grown kids in the whole City.

They let the children pass. They were too old.

All but one.

A boy ducked around a rock and came face to face with one of Earl's men. He stopped dead in his tracks. He tried to turn to run away but the man clubbed him with his rifle butt before he could move. The boy fell, his head squashed like a melon.

The first woman came out. Her coarse hair was cut short, almost shaven. Her breasts were scarred. She had a stone plug in her lower lip. She had no child.

Earl waited, his pulse pounding.

The rest of the women emerged into the sunlight, grunting. Young and old, fat and thin—they all looked hard. They all stank. They moved fast, muscles gleaming in their naked skins. They scuttled like spiders.

Earl counted rapidly. Five of them, five of them with babies in their arms. Five! That was more than enough. That was more than he had hoped for. That was a fortune!

He leaped to his feet, steadied his rifle at his shoulder, and squeezed the trigger. He got one of the mothers in the back of the head with his first shot. She fell, dropping her child. The baby cried when it hit the ground. Another woman turned and started back for it. Earl shot her in the chest.

He whirled, his dark eyes narrowed. There was one target still on her feet. She was running fast, back toward the cave. He dropped her with two shots before she made it. Her baby was old enough to crawl. Incredibly, it tried to crawl away from its dead mother, into the cave.

Earl ran over and snatched it up in his left arm. The baby cried

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piercingly, doubling its tough little body and wetting on Earl's arm. Earl ignored it.

"Okay!" he hollered. "We've got 'em! Ed, throw some shots along that path to keep them running. The rest of you open up into that cave. We don't want the rest of them out here!"

The rifles growled in a steady barrage. The warm air was still now and filled with the acrid fumes of blue gunsmoke. Already, the flies were settling on the fallen bodies.

Earl gave it two full minutes. That was a lot of slugs, even for a self-loader. There wouldn't be anything else coming out of that hole for awhile.

"Enough!" he yelled. "Get those kids on the sled and hold on tight!"

He handed his baby to Ed, which gave Ed two. He grabbed the controls, checked quickly to make sure all was secure, and lifted the sled into the air.

He took it easy. The babies were the important thing now. He had to get them to Doc and the waiting mothers and then he had to get them all back to the sleds.

He grinned. He couldn't miss now!

Behind him, the sun burned down on the rock-strewn plateau above the cliffs. A green lizard poked its head out and scurried over one of the motionless bodies. Far up in the blue sky, black shapes wheeled and began to drift down the warm currents of the air.

The dark hole of the cave was empty and silent.

They had no further trouble.

Most of the savage men were still in the caves but they made no attempt to come out. They were deep in the interior caverns, those that were still alive, and they would stay there at least until nightfall. Whatever they felt, they could not fight now, not even for their children. They couldn't get close enough to fight.

Earl landed the sled and Doc and the mothers took over. Doc gave preliminary shots to the five babies, calming them down and getting rid of some of the bugs. The mothers claimed the infants for the trip back to the City. They had one mother too many but Earl took care of that, ruling that the girl who had screamed would have to do without. She was miserable, but she was too frightened to argue.

If she behaved herself, she would still have a chance when they got to the City. They would put the names of the mothers into a random selector and one of them would get to keep a child. That was what brought the mothers here.

The mothers wanted to try to nurse the babies right away; all of them had been treated so that their

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milk would be ready. Earl had faced that problem before.

"Get moving," he said. "We can't stay here. You can nurse them tonight, on the sleds. If we're attacked out here in the open we may have to run for it. If we do, we'll leave the babies behind and you'll never see them again."

He did not have the remotest intention of abandoning a couple of million dollars, but his threat got the mothers moving toward the stream. The mothers were completely transformed, cooing and stroking their smelly infants with a happiness that was beyond anything they had ever imagined. They had forgotten all about being tired.

Earl sent one of the men up in the sled. It would do no harm to have a lookout. He stayed on the ground himself, right behind the mothers. He wasn't going to let the babies get out of his sight.

Suddenly, he was exhausted. He knew what was the matter with him.

He was starting back toward the City.

He kept his feelings to himself. The mood of the others on the expedition had swung full circle. They had accomplished their mission and they were on the way home; they were carefree and full of bounce. Earl Stuart had to force himself now. It was not easy to be different, to be always out of phase, but he had learned to live with it.

He felt a kind of sympathy for the babies he had stolen. Poor devils, they didn't know what they were getting into.

He broke one of his rules, taking the sleds into the air before dark. He wanted to get away from those caves, just in case. They flew all night, chasing a new moon of silver, and holed up during the daylight hours. They were in the air most of the next night as well, landing before dawn within sight of the City's brilliant glare.

All that day they remained hidden.

After midnight, they walked the last few miles to the concealed tunnel.

Earl Stuart took them through the tunnel.

When they came out of the tunnel, Owen Meissner's security agents were waiting for them, and that was that.

Helen Sanderson looked for a ray of hope and didn't find it.

She was oddly calm, almost relaxed. Two weeks ago, when the syndicate had told her that the expedition had failed and there would be no baby at any price, she had gone into hysterics.

That was over now.

Maybe the new medicine had helped, maybe not.

It didn't matter.

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She had told Larry that she would accept one of the Lab babies but she knew that she would never do it. The Lab babies hardly ever lived more than a month or two, and that would be too terrible. She couldn't face it. She couldn't ask Larry to go through that. She had been enough trouble for Larry.

It was no good.

She sat on the small bed with the blue cover. She looked around the room, fixing it in her mind. She tried to remember how it had been, the few times when Bobby had played with his toys. She touched the soft brown bear next to the pillow.

She got up, very quietly, and walked through the silent apartment. So many rooms, she thought. So many empty rooms. . . .

She went into the study and switched on the recorder. She set it for both voice and picture. Her hand was steady. She looked straight into the recorder and spoke in a firm, clear voice. "I am Helen Sanderson," she said. "Being of sound mind and body, I have this night exercised my right of free will. I accept the sole responsibility for my action and for my decision. I do swear and affirm that no coercion has been employed against me, either mental or physical." She paused, and then finished: "I was Helen Sanderson."

She turned off the recorder. It would supply the time and the date automatically.

It was only a formula, of course, but it would save Larry any possible trouble.

She slipped through the darkened bedroom and into the bathroom. She took the black box from the top shelf of the medicine cabinet and opened it. There were two red capsules inside.

She took one, washed it down with water, and replaced the black box neatly on the shelf.

She felt nothing yet. She knew there would be no pain. It was, they said, just like going to sleep.

She went into the bedroom and got into bed. She leaned over and kissed her sleeping husband.

He stirred but did not wake up.

"Goodbye, Larry," she said. "I'm sorry."

She closed her eyes and waited.

It didn't take long.

Alex Norfolk sat alone in his office, thinking.

He was a man who had spent much of his life alone, and he usually preferred it that way. Tonight, however, it was different.

He wanted to talk to Earl Stuart.

It was impossible, of course. There were some things that even the head of the Science Institute could not do, and visiting a convicted prisoner on the eve of his treatment was definitely one of them.

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Earl Stuart still had some rights. Tomorrow, he wouldn't be Earl Stuart any longer. He would be someone—or something—else. He wouldn't want to spend his last night talking to Alex Norfolk.

Alex had put him where he was.

It was no use blaming the Directive, or the police, or the irony of fate, whatever that might be. Alex was the one who implemented the Directive. He was responsible.

He could never explain to Earl Stuart. Even if he managed to make him understood, that would only make it worse for Earl. It would make his last night a hell on earth.

Earl Stuart, of course, had been born a savage. Alex had known it as soon as he had seen his picture. Those high, flaring cheekbones, those almost-black eyes—they gave him away. A close examination of Earl's faked birth records had confirmed it. Earl had been stolen from the caves while he was a baby and sold to Graham Stuart. He had spent his adult life butchering his own people—quite likely, his own brothers and sisters.

How could he tell Earl that?

Alex got his pipe going. He shivered and pulled his cloak more closely about him. He had lost some weight; he was down to one hundred and seventy-five pounds. He felt old tonight, old and tired.

It was hard to live with uncertainty. If only he could be *sure*. But he could never achieve that. Uncertainty was the curse of the civilized man. No final answers, no freedom from doubt, no pipeline to Olympus. Earl Stuart had been sure, but he had been wrong, tragically wrong. The savages, prowling the wastelands with their spears and stones, were sure.

. . .

Alex thought it through.

Had he forgotten anything?

Reviewing the problem was like walking down an old, familiar street. Alex Norfolk had walked that street many, many times. It held no surprises for him.

Still, Alex was old-fashioned in some respects.

He had to go on trying until he passed the responsibility on to someone else.

The basic problem could be stated succinctly enough: the human animal was fast becoming extinct. It was as simple as that, really. Like most of man's simple problems—love, hate, war, general pig-headedness—it had no simple solution.

For a very long time, it had looked as though it had no solution at all.

The whole thing had come as a terrible surprise, a kind of cosmic kick in the pants. For centuries, man had operated on three fundamental assumptions. He had been so sure of them that he hadn't bothered to think about them; he had taken them for granted and

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gone blithely on his way. He had believed that his immediate problem was one of overpopulation. Where, the wise men asked, would all the people live on this crowded planet? He had believed that technology could solve any problem. If there wasn't enough food to go around, he could harvest the sea or colonize other planets, couldn't he? And one day, he believed, man would give rise to something better. The superman, his awesome brain bulging, was always lurking just around the corner. Wasn't that what evolution was all about? Man looked in the mirror and concluded that he was very hot stuff indeed. He couldn't be only a dead end, could he?

His three basic assumptions had joined a long list of their predecessors in history's commodious junk-pile. In a scant few hundred years, man had found himself in the same situation he had been in at the beginning: he was a comparatively rare animal. Technology had gone on producing its magic—but like other magics it had failed in the clutch. And superman had been unavoidably detained. He had not come to the rescue on schedule. He had not come at all.

How had it happened?

Alex Norfolk wished he knew, to put it mildly.

There were clues, of course. There were those at the Institute who called them theories. At best, though, they were educated guesses.

The answer, if there was one, was hidden somewhere in the record of life on the planet Earth. Extinction was a part of that record, a very big part. Extinction was as much a principle of evolution as mutation or natural selection or survival. Another of man's happy assumptions was that he was immune to extinction, barring an explosion of the sun or his own carelessness with nuclear wapons.

Extinction was for the dinosaurs, wasn't it?

The dinosaurs were so specialized, the pundits always pointed out. Not like man. Marvelous, generalized, adaptable man.

Well, consider the dinosaurs. Some of them had tipped in at thirty-five tons, and some had been no bigger than chickens. Some had eaten meat, some had eaten vegetation. Some had lived on the land, others in the sea. Some had flown. The dinosaurs had done pretty well for sixty million years or so, but there weren't any kicking around now. Why not?

Disease? A change in the weather? Rat-sized mammals with a propensity for sucking eggs?

Maybe.

The plain fact was that nobody knew what had happened to the dinosaurs.

Pity the poor dinosaur? Sixty million years was a long time.

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Man had been on the scene for less than three million years, and even that was defining man rather broadly. Man was a very young animal. His staying power was anybody's guess.

Alex was tired of worrying about the dinosaurs. The mammals were more interesting, and a lot closer to home.

The roll-call of extinct mammals was long and impressive. It was also very puzzling. Leaving aside the early ones, the list was still substantial. Mastodon, mammoth, sabre-toothed tiger, dire wolf—there were hundreds of them. Whole species of antelope and rabbits and moose and beaver and bison. Sometimes, it was very peculiar indeed. The ground sloth dies, the tree sloth lives. The horse disappears in the New World but survives in the Old. One kind of rabbit perishes and another kind, practically identical, flourishes.

Coming closer to home, look at the primates. Once, the primates had formed a rich and varied mammalian order. Prosimians, monkeys, apes—most of them were known only from fossils. Some, like Parapithecus, were long gone. Some, like the gorilla, had lasted just long enough to be photographed and studied. Many of them—whole groups and clusters and species—had known their day in the sun, and then—*pffft*

Sunburn?

Move still closer to home. Look at man himself. His family tree had a lot of dead wood on it. Old man Neanderthal had been clever, big-brained, resourceful. Where had he gone? Sinanthropus had probably been quite pleased with himself, until he disappeared. Australopithecus and Meganthropus and all the other jawbreakers—they were as dead as the dodo.

And Homo sapiens, self-crowned King of the World?

He'd certainly gotten off to an impressive start. He had lived for most of his years as a hunter of game and a gatherer of wild plant foods. He had been rare at first, but he had multiplied. He had spread over most of the Earth—deserts and ice sheets and mountains and plains and tropical islands. With the invention of agriculture he had multiplied still further. There had been an explosion of population and man had become a city-dwelling animal. By the time he had made his first atomic bomb, there were more men on Earth than had lived throughout all of recorded and unrecorded history.

Once, there had been a rich diversity of human cultures. Man, collectively, was little more than an idea and a set of similar biological characteristics. In fact, he had been Hopi and Cheyenne, Aztec and Ona, Masai and Zulu, Polynesian and Bushman and Arunta. . . .

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Then he had changed. One lifeway—urban, industrialized, specialized—had been more powerful than all the rest. The others had adapted or they had died. Man moved into the cities, and the cities blanketed the Earth.

Man had seemed omnipotent. He had reached out for the stars—

And, incredibly, he had faltered.

Something had gone wrong.

Something had gone very wrong indeed. . . .

At first, it had been a small thing.

The big families had disappeared, quietly and without fuss. Where once, in Africa and elsewhere, a man had thought nothing of having twenty children by three or four wives, it became usual for a man to have only two children. Fine, so much better for the kids! And how could a man send twenty children to school? And school lasted for twenty years, then twenty-five, then thirty—

Soon, even two children were a rarity. One child was enough, wasn't it? There was no time for children.

It got harder to have even one child. Sterile couples were not unusual by any means. Whole fields of medicine and biology went into action. But the children didn't come. . . .

The cities failed to reproduce themselves.

Why?

Alex Norfolk puffed on his pipe and shook his head. *Why?*

The plain fact was that nobody knew.

Oh, it was possible to guess. Guesses were cheap. Any fool could guess.

The atomic wars had helped, probably. They had killed millions, wiped out whole cities. There had been a lot of radiation, a lot of strangely distorted children. But all that was over, finished centuries ago. The doctors coudn't find anything wrong with Genus Homo.

"You're in good shape," the doctor said, and the patient keeled over on his way out of the office. . . .

The birth control pills had played a part in it, or so some scientists believed. They had been mass produced at one time, and most people had swallowed a lot of them. They worked, despite all the jokes. Quite possibly, they had worked too well.

Of all the theories, ranging from the fantastic to the plausible, Alex was inclined to accept the most subtle. There was a clear correlation between life in the cities and certain types of illness—heart disease, ulcers, nervous breakdowns, high blood pressure. Even cancer, ultimately, had been linked with stress situations.

The lifeway that man had fashioned for himself was fast, ner-

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vous, taut. It was a driven culture, a high pressure culture. It was a culture a man had to get away from occasionally in order to stay sane. And there was nowhere to go. A man took his culture with him. Play became more frantic than work—

Maybe man was a low pressure guy. He had evolved in a world of great distances, a world of quiet, a world of small social units. Yes, even a world of leisure—for a hunter spent more of his time sitting around the fire than he did hunting. There had been time for telling stories, time for dancing, time for dozing with an empty head. . . .

Stress could affect fertility. Stress could affect children. Stress could tie a man in knots so tight he could never escape from them.

Whatever it was—and nobody *knew* the answer—man stopped breeding. There were few children born. The children who were born seldom lived to be adults.

The great cities contracted. There weren't many left now.

Man, who had covered the Earth, was a rare animal again. He was getting scarce.

There were forms of life—clams, for instance—that seemed to be virtually immortal. Man wasn't a clam.

He was faced with extinction.

He had tried everything. He had attempted to seed other planets, but his colonies had not survived. The other worlds of the solar system were not well suited to man, and the planets of other stars could not be reached. He had established utopian communities on Earth—there had been a desperate exodus from the cities at one time. Back to the good old days and the natural life! Utopian communities never worked; they were infinitely more artificial than the cities, and the people in them always brought their culture with them. A farmer who had lived most of his life in the city was apt to be one hell of a farmer. . . .

The geneticists grew babies in the labs, babies by the hundreds and the thousands. They selected the strains, tinkered with them, improved them. The babies were fine, fat, and healthy. But they could not and did not grow up in the labs, and when they were given to childless couples they lived a few years and died.

There was only one thing to do.

The scientists could not save a particular culture, barring a miracle. They could not save a city, a civilization, a way of life. They could not save their friends.

They had a chance to save the species.

That was all.

Important? Alex Norfolk smiled to himself. It was important if you happened to be a member of that species.

It was important to him.

More than two hundred years

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ago, the Institute had selected thousands of babies from the labs. They had taken them outside, into the wastelands beyond the cities. They had been very careful with those babies. They had nursed them along with all the skill they could command. They had taught them only a few simple techniques for survival—how to hunt, how to fish, how to find edible roots and berries.

Some of them had lived.

When they had been able to fend for themselves—when the oldest men were in their twenties—the scientists had abandoned them.

The savages—and they *were* savages—had lived.

More then that, they multiplied.

There weren't many of them. They developed a fairly distinct physical type. They were dirty and ignorant and cruel and infested with bugs.

They had no science. Their technology was pitiful. Their shamans were laughable.

But they had something that no man in the City had.

They had a future.

They had a chance.

They might not make it, of course. The path they walked was long, long and dangerous. But man had walked that path before, against the same odds. He could do it again.

It wouldn't be the same path, not exactly. Man would make different mistakes, he would have different successes. His path would be different enough so that it might lead to—something else.

If he ever got that far, the Archives would be waiting.

He would have time to consider.

Alex Norfolk refilled his pipe. It would have helped him if he could have talked to Earl Stuart. Earl would be going in for treatment soon. If he could have explained—

The expeditions were deadly, they were fatal. A few of the babies they brought back would have survived in the City, as Earl himself had done. But not enough to make any real difference. And every savage killed, every baby stolen, cut down on the chance the savages had to survive.

The expeditions robbed man of his future.

And the people of the City could not join the savages, even if they wanted to. That was fantastic. A horde of civilized men and women running out to the caves—

Both would perish.

Earl Stuart wouldn't care, probably. He was what he was. But it would have eased Alex's mind, lifted the load a little.

Well, that was impossible.

Alex Norfolk stood up, wrapping his cloak around him.

His job was nearly done. He was an old man, and Randall

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Wade was waiting to take over. Randy was ready. He could do the job.

The job would end with Randy, very likely.

There might be one more after him.

Alex shrugged. It was none of his concern now.

He had done his best.

He walked out of his office, into the City.

The headman of the Little River band of the People sat on a rock. He was on the plateau above the caves and he was soaking up the sun. His left leg had been lanced by a stone splinter in the raid and it had stiffened up on him. The sun felt good on his leg, and it was important to the headman that he be able to walk without a limp.

If he were not strong, he would not be headman any longer. The People would not listen to him, no matter how wise his words might be. They would listen to someone else, and thus there would be a new headman.

He had been lucky. The band had suffered heavy losses in the raid, but it could have been worse. There had been much grumbling, but then the five babies had come back.

It had been very strange. The five babies had been stolen by the Strong Ones. They had been taken away; he had seen them go. And then one morning they had returned. The band had awakened to the sound of their crying outside the caves.

It was magic, of course.

The headman did not understand it, but he had not gotten to be headman by being stupid. He kept his mouth shut and took the credit.

If the ancestors wished to help him, that was as it should be. He would take all the help he could get. He only wished that the ancestors had not been asleep when the raiders had come. A man could not always rely on the ancestors.

It had been hard to find women with milk for the babies. There might not be enough for all of them. Some might have to be eaten.

The headman put the problem out of his mind. He did not have to make that decision yet. Anyway, it was not crucial.

There would be more babies.

Some lived, some died.

That was the way.

He got up from the rock and walked to the edge of the cliff. He checked to see that his lookouts were in position. He smiled. They were there. He would have no trouble with the lookouts, not for many suns. As long as the memory of the raid was fresh they would keep watch. In time, they would grow careless.

Then he would have to do it all.

He could not order the People to do anything.

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He could only suggest, and if his leg went bad on him—

He frowned and shaded his eyes. Was that a figure approaching Little River?

It was. One solitary figure, walking slowly. The lookouts, lower down, had not spotted him yet.

The headman shivered. All of the hunters were in. There was no other band camped nearby. No man of the People would come that way, alone and with no spear.

It was one of the Strong Ones.

The headman did not hesitate. He cupped his hands and called out to his lookouts. He grabbed his spear and ran into the cave, ignoring the pain in his leg.

He knew what he had to do.

The Strong One was alone.

This time, the People would be ready.

Alex Norfolk waded into the stream and stopped. He was covered with sweat and he was tired. The walk from the sled had been more difficult than he had expected. The sun was very hot and the big blue sky made him dizzy.

The water was cool and pleasant. He splashed some on his face and on the back of his neck.

Last night, on the sled, he had been in a philosophical mood. He had looked out at the stars in the great vault of the night and he had been comforted. The thought had come to him that there was more than one way to get close to the stars.

Now, he was weary. He felt his years. He knew that it was a quixotic gesture he was making, and he remembered thinking that one of man's troubles was that he no longer made quixotic gestures very often. But it was hard to think now. He had done his thinking, made his decisions.

He wanted to get it over with.

He waded on across the stream and climbed out on the bank. He began to walk slowly but steadily through the grass. He could see the dark caves in the cliffs ahead.

Damn it, where were they? Did he have to go all the way up there and knock on the door?

He kept walking. His heart hammered in his chest.

Where were they?

He took another step, and another, and another—

There!

Silent as shadows, they rose up all around him out of the tall grass. Their teeth were bared, their spears ready. He could see the bugs crawling in their dirty hair, he could smell the rank odor of their bodies. . . .

He stood up straight. He kept his eyes open.

He hardly felt it when the stone points of the spears ripped into his flesh.

It could not be said that Alex Norfolk died happily, but his was a more useful death than most. ◄

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We live in an era of awe-inspiring, problem-solving specialization: personnel analysis, financial analysis, psychoanalysis—all geared for the ordinary incompetent Joe who is losing his job, his fortune, or his mind. Mr. Fortescue had real *problems, however. He was losing everything that walked into his brand new House of Fun, Magic and Mystery. Which naturally called for some very fancy dimensional analysis . . .*

DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS AND MR. FORTESCUE

by Eric St Clair

WHAT HAD BECOME OF IRVING Gallagher?

Irving Gallagher, the reporter from the DAILY BUGLE, come to do a story on Mr. Fortescue's brand new (not even opened yet!) House of Fun, Magic and Mystery —where was he now with his slouch hat and his notebook and his stubby pencil?

Mr. Fortescue had not the faintest idea. The last he had seen of Gallagher had been a sort of visible *pop,* after which there was no more Gallagher. This had occurred yesterday evening, thirty paces into the black corridor of the fun house, in the glimmer of Mr. Fortescue's flashlight.

"Hey, Mr. Gallagher!" brought no answering cry; search, hours and hours of search (careful, always, to avoid the possibly fatal spot of evanishment!) met no Gallagher, living or dead.

Flashlight still in hand, because the power had not yet been turned on, Mr. Fortesque waited hopelessly in his office, waited . . . waited . . .

It was most unfortunate. This town *needed* a good fun house where young fellows could steer their girls through dark and scary passages with lots of green skeletons lurking, ready to lunge—at which the girls would holler, and throw their arms around the fellows' necks. Many an ice-pack that had dammed the river of romance would be thereby broken up. Mr. Fortescue had hoped to

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escort the beautiful Mureen Wellesley to his greenest skeleton, so that she, too, might holler and throw her arms. . . .

Mr. Fortescue's shoulders sagged. Irving Gallagher being departed (to what unimagineable locale?), there would now be no nice write-up in the BUGLE. The publicity, if any, might be most unfavorable. Questions might be asked. Cops, even, might swarm through the House of Fun, Magic and Mystery—and what kind of business can you do in a fun house full of cops?

Mureen, ah, Mureen of the violet eyes! Further off than ever—for who would dare aspire so high with no more to offer than a probably defunct fun house?

So absorbed was Mr. Fortescue in these none-too-pleasant thoughts that at first he did not hear the beating at the front door. The beating continued, growing louder and more thunderous, and a voice bellowed, "Open up! In the Name of the Law!" BAM BAM BAM! Hearing it at last, Mr. Fortescue cowered.

"The cops!" he whispered.

It was indeed the cops, personified by a fat detective named Wallace O'Banion. Detective Inspector O'Banion chewed his cigar savagely at Mr. Fortescue, and displayed an enormous and very impressive badge covered with engraved stars and eagles, and probably made of solid gold. Trembling a bit, Mr. Fortescue at once asked the inspector to his office, and produced his license to do business. It was in good order. Next, Mr. Fortescue showed his State Board of Equalization Permit to Collect Sales and Admission Taxes, which was also valid. He then riffled through his sheaf of building permits (plumbing, electrical work, foundations, roofing, etc.), and let the inspector look at the certification from the State Medical Society that none of the skeletons on display were human. His city and county taxes were unpaid, but they were not due for six months.

Finally, he allowed Inspector O'Banion to handle a crisp ten-dollar bill, which the inspector admired very much.

Nevertheless, O'Banion continued to chew his cigar at Mr. Fortescue, though with somewhat less savagery. "The BUGLE," he said at last, "claim they lost a reporter, name of Gallagher. Seen him?" Woodenly, Mr. Fortescue shook his head. "No?" said the inspector. "But I tracked him here . . ."

The story is told of an Indian tracker who, finding a wolf dead of old age, followed the wolf's tracks (just to keep in trim) back, back, back to the very cave where the wolf had been whelped ten years before.

Inspector Wallace O'Banion was such a tracker. It showed in

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the way he chewed his cigar, in his piercing stare, in the very jut of his jaw. He made no mistakes in his tracking. "I will get to the bottom of this," said the inspector. "Turn on the lights."

"There are no lights," said Mr. Fortescue. "The power is not turned on yet."

Heavily, the inspector considered this. "Then I will use my flashlight," he said at last. "Come along." Flashlight in one hand, heavy pistol in the other, he advanced into the gloomy halls of the fun house. Mr. Fortescue followed.

The inspector's flashlight showed up nothing scary—indeed, the interior seemed pretty sordid. It was not supposed to be looked at, illuminated by a police inspector's flashlight.

Stolidly, relentlessly, O'Banion tromped on. Then he stopped, and crouched over. "Look at that," he said, snuffing as a hound snuffs. "There's no more trail. It ends there." He pointed to a spot a few feet ahead.

"Do not go there—" cried Mr. Fortescue in anguish.

"I will get to the bottom of this," said O'Banion. He stepped forward.

And there was no more Detective Inspector Wallace O'Banion.

"My word!" said Mr. Fortescue. "Hey!" he croaked wildly. "Inspector! Where are you?" There was no answer. And no inspector.

Presumably, he had tracked down his man—for it was on this very spot that the reporter, Irving Gallagher, had also gone hence, flashlight, notebook and all. Wherever Gallagher now was, the inspector must be with him. But where on earth—or elsewhere?—could they be?

Mr. Fortescue almost wept with real sorrow, for truly he was now a ruined man. A newspaper reporter, missing, was one thing; a disappeared detective inspector was something quite different. Mr. Fortescue would lose his fun house, he would lose the beautiful Mureen—or rather, his chance to win her. It was gone, alas.

So he went to police headquarters to give himself up, and it is easier to imagine than to describe all that he went through in trying to explain what had happened to Inspector O'Banion.

Nobody there believed a word he said, though, being policemen, they regarded him with deep suspicion—but there was nothing he could be booked for. Toward evening, after a pretty stormy all-day session, they turned him loose. "Do not leave town!" they told him. "We will get to the bottom of this!" And they detailed a patrolman to go to the fun house with Mr. Fortescue and check up on things.

"Don't go there!" Mr. Fortescue begged when the patrolman in his investigation came to the spot

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that had swallowed up both Gallagher and O'Banion.

"Why not?" the patrolman asked. "I have orders to get to the bottom of this." And he stepped forward bravely.

He did not vanish, perhaps because he hugged the wall closely. "Come on!" he said, and Mr. Fortescue followed, gingerly, wondering how it would feel to be vanished from human sight. He did not find out; he remained clearly visible—and the incident did not increase the patrolman's confidence in his veracity.

"Where'd you hide the bodies?" the patrolman demanded. "Come clean!"

"There are no bodies," said Mr. Fortescue. "I did not hide them."

There were still no grounds for taking Mr. Fortescue into custody, so (after a few stern stares) the patrolman took his leave.

Mr. Fortescue thereupon went into his office, unlocked the drawers of his desk and had a stiff snort of some genuine Spanish sherry he had been saving to celebrate with.

Celebrate, indeed! What was there to celebrate? He was definitely under police suspicion, and after O'Banion failed to report in, the suspicion would darken to certainty. But could he, Mr. Fortescue, have imagined the whole thing? Certainly not!—he had seen with his own eyes . . . but perhaps now the curse, or whatever it was, was off. The patrolman had not vanished . . . nor had Mr. Fortescue . . . Maybe it was safe now . . . maybe his fun house would not have to be ruined . . . Maybe Mureen . . . He had another snort of sherry.

A knock sounded outside, a gentle knock, tremulous . . . "Cops?" whispered Mr. Fortescue. "No," he answered himself, "not cops. They knock heavier." Hoping, but not believing he went to the door. Could it be?

And it was, it was! It was none other than the beautiful Mureen, delightful as a rainbow, as fragrant as a hyacinth, the bloom of her cheek as soft as rose petal—but cold! So cold!

"Mr. Fortescue," she said, "I promised to let you show me your 'fun house'. You may—but only on condition that you behave as a gentleman. For I am a lady," she finished with some sternness.

"I will, Miss Wellesley!" Mr. Fortescue cried, almost whimpering with pleasure and delight at being so near the lovely Mureen. "Enter, I beg of you . . ." But he thought to himself: *The green skeleton—when she sees the green skeleton, she will holler, and . . . and . . . maybe . . . throw her arms. . . ! Oh Boy!*

Every inch a lady, Mureen entered into the dark corridor of the House of Fun, Magic and Mystery. In irreproachable gentlemanly fashion, Mr. Forestecue fol-

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lowed. Thoughts of Mureen crowded every other thought from his brain. He forgot Irving Gallagher, he forgot O'Banion, for there was the fragrant presence of Mureen before him. Her light footfalls before him—

An "ulp" sounded from the darkness, a sweetly melodious "ulp", but nevertheless a genuine "ulp". And the light footfalls no longer sounded.

A horrid thought smote Mr. Fortescue. "Mureen!" he shouted in sheer panic. "I mean, Miss Wellesley! Where are you?" There was no answer from the menacing dark. "Hey, Miss Wellesley! Come back!" Mr. Fortescue carried a flashlight for use in emergency, and if ever there was an emergency, this was it. He hauled out the flashlight.

Mureen was gone, vanished. There was no more Mureen.

Weeping, Mr. Fortescue swung about, and stumbled back through the corridor of his now hateful fun house. He raced through the streets, to the office of the architect who had drawn the plans for the House of Fun, Magic and Mystery. He slammed through the door, and glared at the architect, a bright young fellow with ideas, by the name of Floyd Wright.

"Unmanly Fiend!" cried Mr. Fortescue, "what have you done to me?"

"What do you mean, what have I done?" Floyd enquired.

Sobbing, panting, Mr. Fortescue told him.

"Impossible," said Floyd. "It's against reason—"

"No such thing," a new voice broke in. "I will tell you—" The speaker was one Ivan Splasz, a nut. He had recently taken to lounging about in Floyd's office because nobody else could stand him. Floyd just barely could, so he had Splasz in his hair.

Ivan was truly a nut. Some said he was an unfrocked quantum mechanician, but this was incorrect. He had never been frocked. He had taken every course in quantum theory at the university, and had flunked each one. He had argued every inch of the way with every professor who had tried to teach him. Now that Splasz had used up all the courses, with no more to enroll in, he spent his days writing and mimeographing diatribes and screeds, which he distributed to students and faculty at the university.

Dimensional analysis was his field, and he often filled five pages or more, at a time, with what he considered proofs of knavery, cowardice and stupidity in his erstwhile colleagues in quantum theory.

"Dimensionally," Splasz now said, "the speed of light, c, is L per T, length per time. Divide it by wave length, L, to get frequency—and what do you get?"

"Shut up," Floyd told him, un-

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folding the plans of the fun house he had designed for Mr. Fortescue. "Don't say another word. Lend me your pencil."

Handing over the pencil, Splasz continued: "You get number, a numeric, per T—not a real dimension in the cgs, the Gaussian, or any other system."

"Now," said Floyd, "we enter, thus, by the front door, and proceed so. Right?" With the borrowed pencil, he traced the route taken by those who had vanished.

"Alas, Mureen!" said Mr. Fortescue softly. "I mean Miss Wellesley."

"Hey!" said Floyd suddenly. "What happened to that pencil? It's gone!"

Ivan Splasz stared at him in cold rage. "What did you do to my solid gold ball point pen?" he demanded. "You have vanished my pen, you and your dimensionally fallacious formulae. Call yourself an architect! Dog-house builder!"

"Be quiet, Ivan," said Floyd. "Let me think."

Mr. Fortesque spoke in an awed voice. "The same, identical thing happened in the fun house," he said. "One minute here, the next, gone. Only there, it was Mureen," he finished with a sob.

"It is topology," Floyd said. "I must accidentally have made a Moebius Strip. People go round and round, and come out there. Or, it is a Klein Bottle—"

These were excellent explanations—clear, terse and fairly scitific—but, quite in character, Splasz ignored them. "I have been deriving formulae," he told them, "in my head. I see where you made your blunder. Dimensionally, my good man, your boner is a dilly." Ivan Splasz hauled out the thick black grease pencil that he used for writing defamatory comments in library books on quantum mechanics, and hastily scrawled a number of formulae on Floyd Wright's drawing board.

"STOP!" Floyd yelled. "That's my almost finished drawing for the Civic Center Design Contest!"

"My boy," said Ivan, "you will thank me for this. You'd be in *real* trouble if you vanished the mayor and the city council with your dimensionally naive—"

"Mureen!" Mr. Fortescue wailed softly. "Gone. Vanished."

"—dimensionally naive formulae," Ivan continued. "But I will save you." He added some L's and T's to the already considerable array of Latin, Greek and Hebrew characters. "I will show you how to design in a properly dimensional analytic manner. This," heavily underlining it, "is the differential expression for the point-path. I will now integrate it." He did so.

Floyd had been watching with only moderate interest, but he suddenly stiffened. "What is *c* doing in those equations?" He de-

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manded. "The velocity of light, *c*; I don't need *c* to design buildings."

"Light . . ." said Ivan Splasz dreamily, a lyrical gleam coming to his eye, ". . . light is all about us. Light from the most distant stars that takes a hundred million million years to reach us. Light by night, and light by day, everywhere there is light, darting, pulsating—and whenever there is light, there is the velocity of light, *c*. Naturally, I put *c* in the equations. Design your buildings with *c*, and you will not design buildings that vanish people."

"Phooey!" said Floyd. "You are indeed a nut."

"*And* my solid gold ball-point pen," Ivan finished with some venom. "You vanished my ball-point pen. So now I will get it back—with no thanks to you."

Ivan set about snipping a very odd-shaped plane figure from a sheet of Floyd's heavy drafting paper—

"Stop that!" said Floyd. "Paper like that costs plenty!"

Ivan snipped on, paying attention only to what he was doing. He made many measurements, drew lines, erased, redrew them, snipped—but in the end he seemed dubious. "There are two solutions," he said. "I'll try this first, and if it doesn't work—"

Very carefully, he placed a tongue of the paper on Floyd's floor-plan drawing. He moved the tongue toward the place where his ball-point pen had vanished . . . closer . . . closer . . .

It reached the spot. There was a sort of click, and the end of the paper went fuzzy as though it were trying to vanish. Then the paper tautened in Ivan's hands. He tugged, the paper tugged.

"Help!" he said. "Grab hold!"

Mr. Fortescue and Floyd grabbed, and pulled—and the end of the paper came free, back into the world around us. Its end, though, was gone . . . a ragged tear, darkly wet . . . as though Something with black saliva had been chewing at it . . .

"The other solution is the right one," said Ivan calmly. Floyd and Mr. Fortescue stared at the wet, chewed end, and at each other. This was fishing in very dark waters indeed! "Mureen!" said Mr. Fortescue. He began to weep softly.

By this time, Ivan had altered his paper dredge in conformity with the second solution—and with better results. The tongue of paper reached the vanishing point, vanished—and, triumphantly, Ivan jerked it back. Behold! clipped to it, was the solid gold ball-point pen, as good as new. Better than new: it had been beautifully polished, and someone Out There had loaded it with a new cartridge of very superior and long-lasting ink, as Ivan learned later.

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"There's your pattern" said Ivan. He pushed the snippet of drawing paper toward Floyd. "Scale, the same as your drawing, whatever that is. Use half-inch plywood—"

Floyd's eyes—and those of Mr. Fortescue as well—were glazed by now, and had become somewhat protruding. "Half-inch—?"

"Suit yourself," said Ivan. "Three-quarter inch, if you like. Half-inch, though, would be plenty strong to haul them out."

"Haul them out?" said Mr. Fortescue. His face was blank.

"To haul out the people you vanished into the nonth dimension," Ivan Splasz explained, not very patiently.

"The *fourth* dimension?" Floyd said.

"The *nonth* dimension!" Ivan said firmly. "Your slap-dash, dimensionally improper, way of figuring inevitably ended up with a dimensionless lay-out. So, naturally, the people—and my ball-point pen!—slipped into a space of no dimension, the nonth dimension. Q E D."

So they built a strange-looking frame out of half-inch plywood because it would be lighter to handle. They loaded it into Floyd's truck, which was painted yellow like the County trucks, and carted it to the House of Fun, Magic and Mystery.

Two patrolmen were stationed at the entrance, assigned to guard against nobody knew quite what. "Halt!" they said. "Who goes?"

Floyd thought rapidly. "County office," he said. "With a fire escape." He pointed to the contraption.

The patrolmen gazed at Floyd's county-yellow truck, and nodded wisely. "Who's the owner?" they asked.

"I am," Mr. Fortescue assured them.

"Pass," said the patrolmen, stepping aside.

Floyd, Ivan and Mr. Fortescue dragged the so-called fire escape into the fun house, which was lighted now, because the police department had so ordered.

Slowly, awkwardly, they pushed it toward the spot of evanishment. The forward edge of the plywood wavered, grew dim. "Pull!" Ivan yelled, and they pulled manfully.

And out from the nonth dimension came Irving Gallagher, reporter to the DAILY BUGLE, beady-eyed and scribbling madly in his notebook. "I have been there!" he shouted. "I have my own eye-witness exclusive story of the Fourth Dimension!"

"The nonth dimension," Ivan corrected. "What was it like?" he asked with mild interest.

"All green and purple triangles!" cried Irving Gallagher. "Going every which way! And the natives—such weirdies!" He stopped himself, and stared at Splasz. "Say," Gallagher went on slowly,

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"What do *you* want to know for? Trying to steal my scoop?" For an instant he clamped his mouth at Ivan, tight as a geoduck, then said, "Read it when it comes out. 'I Saw the Fourth Dimension', some such title. I'll syndicate it, make a million dollars! Hooray!" He galloped off, yipping with glee from time to time.

"They won't pay anything for that stuff," said Ivan. "And anyhow, it is not the fourth dimension; it's the *nonth*."

"You are likely to see anything in print these days," said Floyd. "He really might make a million from it."

"Mureen!" moaned Mr. Fortescue. "Where are you, Mureen?"

"Be of good cheer," said Floyd. "We'll fish for her next."

But they did not catch Mureen; instead, they caught none other than Inspector Wallace O'Banion. "Stick them up!" the inspector roared, levelling his enormous pistol. "I got you covered."

Then he blinked. "Why," he said. "I know you. I must be back home. Ah, that was a grand place I was in!" He sighed heavily. "Crooks everywhere! Catch them right in the act, burglary, arson, safe-cracking. Stick them up, boys, and snap the cuffs on them! And then right away, another one, as fast as I could nab them! I never saw the likes!"

Then his face fell. "So now it's back to this—one arrest a week, if I'm lucky. And like as not, the jury turns him loose on me!" He fumbled at his vest pocket. "I seem to be left-handed. I must have got turned around out there . . ." He withdrew the ten-dollar bill that Mr. Fortescue had let him look at. "My ten-spot!" he cried. "It's all backward!"

Indeed, it was now a mirror image of a ten-dollar bill, having been mysteriously reversed (as was also Inspector O'Banion) by contact with the nonth dimension. It was no longer legal tender, it was not even counterfeit legal tender. It had become, instead, a unique numismatic item of almost fabulous value. A beautiful smile stole over O'Banion's fat face. He knew a dealer in such items, and he knew Something *about* the dealer. He, O'Banion, could realize a great deal of money. . . . "Dough!" breathed the inspector. "Lots of dough!" Grinning, chewing his cigar, the inspector clumped off.

"Mureen!" cried Mr. Fortescue. "Surrounded by those crooks!"

The next victim of the nonth dimension that they rescued was a ghastly surprise. It was a large black cat.

"FIEND!" yelled Mr. Fortescue, beating blindly at Floyd. "You have vilely transformed my beautiful Mureen into a horrid cat!"

"Nonsense;" said Ivan Splasz. "This is a tom cat. So, how could it be Mureen?"

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The cat regarded them with its yellow eyes, licking at what appeared to be cream on its whiskers. Its fur, they could see, was ruffed up and caked with dried blood. An ear was torn, one eye almost closed—but in the good eye, there was a sparkle . . .

"By jing!" said Floyd. "That cat has been on the town! He's been having a wonderful time Out There. Look at him strut!" Proudly, though with an unsteady roll, the cat departed.

A disquieting thought came to Mr. Fortescue. These people, and the cat, who had been in the nonth dimension all seemed to have found there the sort of heaven that each had wanted. Mureen . . . what had she wanted? What heaven, without Mr. Fortescue, had she found?

She was the next to be rescued (from a fate worse than death? Mr. Fortescue shuddered.) She was even lovelier than he remembered her. Seeing him, she blushed prettily, lowering her shining eyes. She sidled shyly toward him.

"Oh, Tisky," she whispered melodiously. "You naughty, *naughty* boy!" She patted his cheek.

"Ahoo," said Mr. Fortescue, unable to say more.

Mureen stood on tiptoe, and kissed him on the nose. "That lovely, lovely week!" she whispered in his ear. "That sweet old hotel . . . the white beach . . . the moon . . . yummy!" She nuzzled his neck. "Mmmmmm!"

"But," said Mr. Fortescue, "I was not . . . ah . . ."

"You were *wonderful!*" she said, "so . . . so . . . And now we had better get married."

"My love!" cried Mr. Fortescue. "My kitten—I mean, my darling!" Married to Mureen—what proud joy, what complete bliss! And she had seemed so cool to him before, so indifferent . . .

Exactly *who* was it had squired Mureen during that week (less than a day in our familiar third dimension)? Was there a Mr. Fortesque existant in the nonth dimension? One, also, in the first, the second, the fourth and each of the higher dimensions, all identical with the Mr. Fortescue of the third dimension? The mind reels, the teeth chatter; one shivers, thinking of it!

But not Ivan Splasz, Dimensional Analyst. Now, slowly, he began to walk toward the vanishing point.

"Hey, Splasz!" Floyd shouted at him. "Watch your step!"

"I know what I'm doing," said Ivan. "Afterward, you can fish me out with the rig, and you can correct your blunders the way I showed you. First, though, I want to see my nonth dimen—" *Splat!* And there was no more Ivan Splasz.

Somewhat horror-stricken, Mr.

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Fortescue and Floyd pushed the plywood structure almost into place. "Wait, now," said Floyd. "Give him time to look around."

Mureen and Mr. Fortescue waited pleasantly, whispering sweet foolishness at one another, and giggling. Floyd, his back to them, stared into space.

"Now!" said Floyd after a quarter of an hour. "Yo heave!"

Stoutly they hauled—but there was no Ivan on the rig. There was a note, though: "Send me full-dress kit. Swallowtail, size 38. Black pants, size 32, satin stripes up sides. White waistcoat, white shirt, size 15, white tie. Etc. Also send Profs. Gring, Weatherbottom, Litvock and Asst. Prof. Kropje to watch me get Nobel Prize, the dopes! *Make it snappy!* King of Sweden here now, waiting. Love, Ivan."

"My word!" said Mr. Fortescue and Floyd, and Mureen said, "Gosh!" They followed Ivan's instructions, but the various professors they did not send.

"Every professor," said Floyd, "dearly wants the Nobel Prize. And Over There people get what they want. There might not be enough Nobel Prizes to go around. They might quarrel."

"*I* wouldn't quarrel over any old Nobel Prize," said Mureen, snuggling against Mr. Fortescue.

"Me neither," said Mr. Fortescue, snuggling right back.

CORRECTION PLEASE

I have just broken the record for arithmetical errors. In my article FIRST AND REARMOST (October 1964) I showed that the electromagnetic force is 4.2×10^{42} times as strong as the gravitational force. That was correct.

But then I wanted to replace the Sun and Earth by an appropriate mass of electrons and positrons to keep the attraction between them the same, and I divided the mass of *both* bodies by 4.2×10^{42}. The attraction then depends upon the product of those two masses and that product represents a ratio of $(4.2 \times 10^{42})^2$. What I should have done is to have divided the mass of the Sun and the Earth, each by the square root of 4.2×10^{42}. That would mean we could replace the Sun by 1,000,000 tons of electrons and the Earth by 3⅓ tons of positrons. These are still tiny masses astronomically speaking, but they are nowhere near as tiny as the masses I originally gave.

Oh, well, if one juggles big numbers, one occasionally makes big boo-boos.

—ISAAC ASIMOV

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BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

by Isaac Asimov

WHEN THIS ARTICLE APPEARS, ANOTHER New Year's Day will be upon us; and because my birthday follows hard upon New Year's Day, the beginning of the year is always a doubled occasion for great and sombre soul-searching on my part.

Perhaps this time I can make my consciousness of passing time less poignant by thinking more objectively. For instance, who says the year starts on New Year's Day? What is there about New Year's Day that is different from any other day? What makes January 1 so special?

In fact, when we chop up time into units, how do we decide where to start that unit?

For instance, let's begin at the beginning (as I dearly love to do) and consider the day itself.

The day is composed of two parts, the daytime* and the night. Each, separately, has a natural astronomic beginning. The daytime begins with sunrise; the night begins with sunset. (Dawn and twilight encroach upon the night but that is a mere detail.)

In the latitudes in which most of humanity live, however, both day and night change in length during the year (one growing longer as the other grows shorter) and there is, therefore, a certain convenience in using daytime plus night as a single twenty-four-hour unit of time. The combination of the two, the day, is of constant duration.

Well, then, should the day start at sunrise or at sunset? You might

** It is very annoying that "day" means both the sunlit portion of time and the twenty-four hour period of daytime and night together. This is a completely unnecessary shortcoming of the admirable English language. I understand that the Greek language contains separate words for the two entities. I shall use "daytime" for the sunlit period and "day" for the twenty-four-hour period.*

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argue for the first since, in a primitive society, that is when the workday begins. On the other hand, in that same society sunset is when the workday ends, and surely an ending means a new beginning.

Some groups made one decision and some the other. The Egyptians, for instance, began the day at sunrise, while the Hebrews began it at sunset.

The latter state of affairs is reflected in the very first chapter of Genesis in which the days of creation are described. In Genesis 1:5 it is written: "And the evening and the morning were the first day." Evening (that is, night) comes ahead of morning (that is, daytime) because the day starts at sunset.

This arrangement is maintained in Judaism to this day and Jewish holidays still begin "the evening before." Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism and remnants of this sunset beginning cling even now to some non-Jewish holidays.

The expression Christmas Eve, if taken literally, is the evening of December 25, but as we all know it really means the evening of December 24—which it would naturally mean if Christmas began "the evening before" as a Jewish holiday would. The same goes for New Year's Eve.

Another familiar example is Allhallows' Eve, the evening of the day before Allhallows' Day, which is given over to the commemoration of all the "hallows" (or "saints"). Allhallows' Day is on November 1, and Allhallows' Eve is therefore on the evening of October 31. Need I tell you that Allhallow's Eve is better known by its familiar contracted form of "Halloween."

As a matter of fact, though, neither sunset nor sunrise is now the beginning of the day. The period from sunrise to sunrise is slightly more than 24 hours for half the year as the daytime periods grow shorter, and slightly less than 24 hours for the remaining half of the year as the daytime periods grow longer. This is also true for the period from sunset to sunset.

Sunrise and sunset change in opposite directions, however, either approaching each other or receding from each other, so that the middle of daytime (midday) and the middle of night (midnight) remain fixed at 24-hour intervals throughout the year. (Actually, there are minor deviations but these can be ignored.)

One can begin the day at midday and count on a steady 24-hour cycle, but then the working period is split between two different dates. Far better to start the day at midnight when all decent people are asleep; and that, in fact, is what we do.

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Astronomers, who are among the indecent minority not in bed asleep at midnight, long insisted on starting their day at midday so as not to break up a night's observation into two separate dates. However, the spirit of conformity was not to be withstood and in 1925, they accepted the inconvenience of a beginning at midnight in order to get into step with the rest of the world.

All the units of time that are shorter than a day, depend on the day and offer no problem. You start counting the hours from the beginning of the day; you start counting the minutes from the beginning of the hour and so on.

Of course, when the start of the day changed its position, that affected the counting of the hours. Originally, the daytime and the night were each divided into twelve hours, beginning at, respectively, sunrise and sunset. The hours changed length with the change in length of daytime and night so that in June (in the northern hemisphere) the daytime was made up of twelve long hours and the night of twelve short hours, while in December the situation was reversed.

This manner of counting the hours still survives in the Catholic church as "canonical hours". Thus, "prime" ("one") is what laymen call 6 A.M. "Tierce" ("three") is 9 A.M., "sext" ("six") is 12 M, and "none" ("nine") is 3 P.M. Notice that "none" is located in the middle of the afternoon when the day is warmest. The warmest part of the day might well be felt to be the middle of the day and the word was somehow switched to the astronomic midday so that we call 12 "noon."

This older method of counting the hours, also plays a part in one of the parables of Jesus (Matthew: 20, 1-16) in which laborers are hired at various times of the day, up to and including "the eleventh hour." The eleventh hour referred to in the parable is one hour before sunset when the working day ends. For that reason, "the eleventh hour" has come to mean the last moment in which something can be done. The force of the expression is lost on us, however, for we think of the eleventh hour as being either 11 A.M. or 11 PM., and 11 A.M. is too early in the day to begin to feel panicky, while 11 P.M. is too late—we ought to be asleep by then.

The week originated in the Babylonian calendar as one day out of seven devoted to rest. (The rationale was that it was an unlucky day.)

The Jews, captive in Babylon in the 6th Century B.C., picked up the notion and established it on a religious basis, making it a day of happiness rather than of ill-fortune. They explained its beginnings

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in Genesis 2:2 where, after the work of the six days of creation—"on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day."

To those societies which accept the Bible as a book of special significance, the Jewish "sabbath" (from the Hebrew word for "rest") is thus defined as the seventh, and last, day of the week. This day is the one marked Saturday on our calendars and Sunday, therefore, is the first day of a new week. All our calendars arrange the days in seven columns with Sunday first and Saturday seventh.

The early Christians began to attach special significance to the first day of the week. For one thing, it was the "Lord's day" since the Resurrection had taken place on a Sunday. Then, too, as time went on and Christians began to think of themselves as something more than a Jewish sect, it became important to them to have distinct rituals of their own. In Christian societies, therefore, Sunday, and not Saturday, became the day of rest. (Of course, in our modern effete times, Saturday and Sunday are *both* days of rest and are lumped together as the "weekend", a period celebrated by automobile accidents.)

The fact that the work-week begins on Monday causes a great many people to think of that as the first day of the week and leads to the following children's puzzle (which I mention only because it trapped me neatly the first time I heard it).

You ask your victim to pronounce t-o, t-o-o, and t-w-o, one at a time, thinking deeply between questions. In each case he says (wondering what's up) "tooooo."

Then you say, "Now pronounce the second day of the week" and his face clears up for he thinks he sees the trap. He is sure you are hoping he will say "toooosday" like a low-brow. With exaggerated precision, therefore, he says "tyoosday".

At which you look gently puzzled and say, "Isn't that strange? I always pronounce it Monday."

The month, being tied to the Moon, began, in ancient times, at a fixed phase. In theory, any phase will do. The month can start at each full Moon, or each first quarter and so on. Actually, the most logical way is to begin each month with the new Moon; that is, on that evening when the first sliver of the growing crescent makes itself visible imediately after sunset. To any logical primitive, a new Moon is clearly being created at that time and the month should start then.

Nowadays, however, the month is freed of the Moon and is tied to the year, which is in turn based on the Sun. In our calendar, in ordi-

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nary years, the first month begins on the first day of the year, the second month on the 32nd day of the year, and the third month on the 60th day of the year, the fourth month on the 91st day of the year and so on —quite regardless of the phases of the Moon. (In a leap year, all the months from the third onward start a day late because of the existence of February 29.)

But that brings us to the year. When does that begin and why?

Primitive agricultural societies must have been first aware of the year as a succession of seasons. Spring, summer, autumn and winter were the morning, midday, evening and night of the year and, as in the case of the day, there seemed two equally-qualified candidates for the post of beginning.

The beginning of the work-year is the time of spring when warmth returns to the earth and planting can begin. Should that not also be the beginning of the year in general. On the other hand, autumn marks the end of the work-year with the harvest (it is to be devoutly hoped) safely in hand. With the work-year ended, ought not the new year begin?

With the development of astronomy, the beginning of the spring season was associated with the vernal equinox (see THE HEAVENLY ZOO, June 1964) which, on our calendar, falls on March 20, while the beginning of autumn is associated with the autumnal equinox which falls, half a year later, on September 23.

Some societies chose one equinox as the beginning and some the other. Among the Hebrews, both equinoxes came to be associated with a New Year's Day. One of these fell on the first day of the month of Nisan (which comes at about the vernal equinox.) In the middle of that month comes the feast of Passover, which is thus tied to the vernal equinox.

Since Jesus, according to the Gospels, was crucified and underwent Resurrection during the Passover season (the Last Supper was a Passover seder), Good Friday and Easter are also tied to the vernal equinox, (see THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS, August 1964).

The Hebrews also celebrated a New Year's Day on the first two days of Tishri (which falls at about the autumnal equinox) and this became the more important of the two occasions. It is celebrated by Jews today as "Rosh Hashonah" ("head of the year"), the familiarly known "Jewish New Year."

A much later example of a New Year's Day in connection with the autumnal equinox came in connection with the French Revolution. On

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September 22, 1792, the French monarchy was abolished and a republic proclaimed. The Revolutionary idealists felt that since a new epoch in human history had begun a new calendar was needed. They made September 22 the New Years Day and established a new list of months. The first month was Vendemiare so that September 22 became Vendémiare 1.

For thirteen years, Vendémiare 1 continued to be the official New Year's Day of the French government, but the calendar never caught on outside France or even among the people inside France. In 1806, Napoleon gave up the struggle and officially reinstated the old calendar.

There are two important Solar events in addition to the equinoxes. After the vernal equinox, the noonday Sun continues to rise higher and higher till it reaches a maximum height on June 21, which is the summer solstice (see THE HEAVENLY ZOO, July 1964) and this day, in consequence, has the longest daytime period of the year.

The height of the noonday Sun declines thereafter till it reaches the position of the autumnal equinox. It then continues to decline further and further till it reaches a minimum height on December 21, the winter solstice and the shortest daytime period of the year.

The summer solstice is not of much significance. Midsummer Day falls at about the summer solstice (the traditional English day is June 24). This is a time for gaiety and carefree joy, even folly. Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" is an example of a play devoted to the kind of not-to-be-taken-seriously fun of the season and the phrase "midsummer madness" may have arisen similarly.

The winter solstice is a much more serious affair. The Sun is declining from day to day and to a primitive society, not sure of the invariability of astronomical laws, it might well appear that *this* time, the Sun will continue its decline and disappear forever so that spring will never come again and all life will die.

Therefore, as the Sun's decline slowed from day to day and came to a halt and began to turn on December 21, there must have been great relief and joy which, in the end, became ritualized into a great religious festival, marked by gaiety and licentiousness.

The best-known example of this are the several days of holiday among the Romans at this season of the year. The holiday was in honor of Saturn (an ancient Italian god of agriculture) and was therefore called the "Saturnalia." It was a time of feasting and of giving of presents; of good-will to men, even to the point where slaves were given

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temporary freedom while their masters waited upon them. There was also a lot of drinking at Saturnalia parties.

In fact, the word "saturnalian" has come to mean dissolute, or characterized by unrestrained merriment.

There is logic, then, in beginning the year at the winter solstice which marks, so to speak, the birth of a new Sun as the first appearance of a crescent after sunset marks the birth of a new Moon. Something like this may have been in Julius Caesar's mind when he reorganized the Roman calendar and made it solar rather than lunar (see THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS, August 1964).

The Romans had, traditionally, begun their year on March 1, which was intended to fall upon the vernal equinox originally but which, thanks to the sloppy way in which the Romans maintained their calendar, eventually moved far out of synchronization with the equinox. Caesar adjusted matters, and moved the beginning of the year to January 1 instead, placing it nearly at the winter solstice.

This habit of beginning the year on or about the winter solstice did not become universal, however. In England (and the American colonies), March 25, intended to represent the vernal equinox, remained the official beginning of the year until 1752. It was only then that the January 1 beginning was adopted.

The beginnng of a new Sun reflects itself in modern times in another way, too. In the days of the Roman Empire, the rising power of Christianity found its most dangerous competitor in Mithraism, a cult that was Persian in origin and was devoted to sun-worship. The ritual centered about the mythological character of Mithras, who represented the Sun, and whose birth was celebrated on December 25—about the time of the winter solstice. This was a good time for a holiday, anyway, for the Romans were used to celebrating the Saturnalia at that time of year.

Eventually, though, Christianity stole Mithraic thunder by establishing the birth of Jesus on December 25 (there is no Biblical authority for this) so that the period of the winter solstice has come to mark the birth of both the Son and the Sun.* There are some present-day moralists (of whom I am one) who find something unpleasantly reminiscent of the Roman Saturnalia in the modern secular celebration of Christmas.

But where do the years begin? It is certainly convenient to number the years, but where do we start the numbers? In ancient times, when

* *Sorry! I couldn't resist!*

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the sense of history was not highly developed, it was sufficient to begin numbering the years with the accession of the local king or ruler. The numbering would begin over again with each new king. Where a city has an annually chosen magistrate, the year might not be numbered at all, but merely identified by the name of the magistrate for that year. Athens named its years by its archons.

When the Bible dates things at all, it does it in this manner.

For instance, in I Kings 16:1, it is written: "In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign." (Pekah was the contemporary king of Israel.)

And in St. Luke 2:2, the time of the taxing, during which Jesus was born, is dated only as follows "And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria."

Unless you have accurate lists of kings and magistrates and know just how many years each was in power and how to relate the list of one region with that of another, you are in trouble, and it is for that reason that so many ancient dates are uncertain—even (as I shall soon explain) a date as important as that of the birth of Jesus.

A much better system would be to pick some important date in the past (preferably one far enough in the past so that you don't have to deal with negative-numbered years before that time) and number the years in progression thereafter, without ever starting over.

The Greeks made use of the Olympian games for that purpose. This was celebrated every four years so that a four year cycle was an "Olympiad." The Olympiads were numbered progressively and the year itself was the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th year of a particular Olympiad.

This is needlessly complicated, however, and in the time following Alexander the Great, something better was introduced into the Greek world. The ancient East was being fought over by Alexander's generals, and one of them, Seleucus, defeated another at Gaza. By this victory, Seleucus was confirmed in his rule over a vast section of Asia. He determined to number the years from that battle, which took place in the 1st year of the 117th Olympiad. That year became Year 1 of the "Seleucid Era" and later years continued in succession as 2, 3, 4, 5 and so on. Nothing more elaborate than that.

The Seleucid Era was of unusual importance because Seleucus and his descendants ruled over Judea, which therefore adopted the system. Even after the Jews broke free of the Seleucids under the leadership of the Maccabees, they continued to use the Seleucid Era in dating their commercial transactions over the length and breadth of the ancient world. Those commercial records can be tied in with various local year-

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dating systems so that many of the latter could be accurately synchronized as a result.

The most important year-dating system of the ancient world, however, was that of the "Roman Era." This began with the year in which Rome was founded. According to tradition, this was the 4th Year of the 6th Olympiad, which came to be considered as 1 A.U.C. (The abbreviation "A.U.C." stands for "Anno Urbis Conditae"; that is, "The Year of the Founding of the City.")

Using the Roman Era, the Battle of Zama, in which Hannibal was finally defeated, was fought in 553 A.U.C., while Julius Caesar was assassinated in 710 A.U.C. and so on. This system gradually spread over the ancient world, as Rome waxed supreme, and lasted well into early Medieval times.

The early Christians, anxious to show that Biblical records antedated those of Greece and Rome, strove to begin counting at a date earlier than that of either the founding of Rome or the beginning of the Olympian games. A Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived about 1050 A.U.C. calculated that the Patriarch, Abraham, had been born 1263 years before the founding of Rome. Therefore, he adopted that year as his Year 1, so that 1050 A.U.C. became 2313, Era of Abraham.

Once the Bible was thoroughly established as *the* book of the western world, it was possible to carry matters to their logical extreme and date the years from the creation of the world. The medieval Jews calculated that the creation of the world had taken place 3007 years before the founding of Rome, while various Christian calculators chose years varying from 3251 to 4755 years before the founding of Rome. These are the various "Mundane Eras" ("Eras of the World.") The Jewish Mundane Era is used today in the Jewish calendar so that when this appears, the Jewish year, 5725, will be in progress.

The Mundane Eras have one important factor in their favor. They start early enough so that there are very few, if any, dates in recorded history that have to be given negative numbers. This is not true of the Roman Era, for instance, The founding of the Olympian games, the Trojan war, the reign of David, the building of the Pyramids, all came before the founding of Rome and have to be given negative year numbers.

The Romans wouldn't have cared, of course, for none of the ancients were very chronology-conscious, but modern historians would. In fact, modern historians are even worse off than they would have been if the Roman Era had been retained.

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About 1288 A.U.C., a Syrian monk named Dionysius Exiguus, working from Biblical data and secular records, calculated that Jesus must have been born in 754 A.U.C. This seemed a good time to use as a beginning for counting the years, and in the time of Charlemagne (two and a half centuries after Dionysius) this notion won out.

The year 754 A.U.C. became 1 A.D. (standing for "Anno Domini" meaning "the year of the Lord"). By this new "Christian Era", the founding of Rome took place in 753 B.C. ("before Christ"). The first year of the first Olympiad was in 776 B.C., the first year of the Seleucid Era was in 312 B.C. and so on.

This is the system used today and as this appears in print 1964 A.D. is coming to an end and 1965 A.D. is beginning. However, this also means that all of ancient history from Sumer to Augustus must be dated in negative numbers, and we must forever be remembering that Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. and that the next year is number 43 and not 45.

Worse still, Dionysius was wrong in his calculations. St. Matthew 2:1 clearly states that "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king." This Herod is the so-called Herod the Great, who was born about 681 A.U.C., and was made king of Judea by Mark Anthony in 714 A.U.C. He died (and this is known as certainly as any ancient date is known) in 750 A.U.C. and therefore Jesus could not have been born any later than 750 A.U.C. at the latest.

But 750 A.U.C., according to the system of Dionysius Exiguus, is 4 B.C., and therefore you are constantly finding it said in lists of dates that Jesus was born in 4 B.C.; that is, four years before the birth of Jesus.

In fact, there is no reason to be sure that Jesus was born in the very year that Herod died. In St. Matthew 2:16, it is written that Herod, in an attempt to kill Jesus, ordered all male children of two years and under to be slain. This verse can be interpreted as indicating that Jesus may have been at least two years old while Herod was still alive and might therefore have been born as early as 6 B.C. Indeed, some estimates have placed the birth of Jesus as early as 17 B.C.

Which forces me to admit sadly that although I love to begin at the beginning, I can't always be sure where the beginning is.

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Once, in correspondence with a Canadian reader, we referred (respectfully in intention) to his country as "Our Lady of the Snows." Much to our surprise, he replied indignantly, accusing us of being ". . . another silly Yankee who thinks that Canada is a vast frozen waste . . ." Thinking nothing of the sort, we pointed out that the phrase is the title of a vastly complimentary poem by the vastly non-Yankee Rudyard Kipling—the only poem, probably, ever written on the subject of a preferential tariff,—A Nation spoke to a Nation,/ A Queen sent word to a Throne:/ "Daughter am I in my mother's house,/ But mistress in my own./ The gates are mine to open,/ As the gates are mine to close,/ And I set my house in order,"/ Said our Lady of the Snows. *So, the first and last verses. Ward Moore, who was born in New Jersey and now lives in California, grew up in the beautiful city of Montreal; and there he sets the scene of a story we are happy to reprint from the Canadian magazine, MACLEAN'S. He sets it, too, amidst the snows, this story of Harwell, Ada, and Jacques Sengalt.* Whose *were the gates to open? And* whose *were the gates to close? Was it the milk of paradise? Or was it . . . something else . . .?*

THE MYSTERIOUS MILKMAN OF BISHOP STREET

by Ward Moore

LAST YEAR, 1907, WE TOOK OUR milk from the Mount Royal Dairy in Outremont. No, that isn't quite right; the whole business has been so unnerving, so confusing, that the moment I begin thinking about it I get upset and make mistakes. Let me straighten out the facts calmly. It was in 1906 that Macwinney, a burly brute of a man with a mustache like William Howard Taft's, who everyone ex-

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pects will succeed Teddy Roosevelt, but much younger—Macwinneys, I mean; Mr. Roosevelt is my own age exactly: fifty, the prime of life as they say rightly, but Macwinney was about Ada's age, thirty-one her last birthday . . .

Let me begin again. It was in 1906 Macwinney drove the Mount Royal milk wagon. He used to deliver on Bishop Street—we had one of those new flats, the upstairs one, light and airy, with a nice breeze off the St. Lawrence in summer and a good furnace with hot-water pipes to keep us snug and cozy in the Montreal winters—he used to deliver on Bishop Street between four and five in the morning, leaving our pint of milk—Imperial pint, that is, none of your Yankee short measures—and a half pint of cream on the stone sidewalk—Bishop Street is right up to date, though they still have wooden walks on much of St. Catherine Street . . .

Excuse me. Somehow I can't seem to settle down to telling about Sengalt. Yet I'm a man who prides himself on precision, a pride I'm bound to say is shared by my superiors; only last month, just after the Queen's Birthday—Empire Day, they want to call it now, but that's nonsense; it's been the queen's Birthday all my life—only last month Mr. Fred Duncan said to me, "Harwell, he said—my name is Edwin Harwell, and Mr. Duncan is chief accountant for the Grand Trunk—"Harwell," Mr. Duncan said, "I rely on you. There isn't a man in the office with an attention to detail the equal of yours." Pretty good, eh? Not another man in the office.

Macwinney used to leave our milk—milk and cream, that is—on the sidewalk by the wooden stairs to our flat. This was comfortable and convenient as you like half the year; many's the summer morning I've enjoyed—actually enjoyed—padding down the steps to the street in my slippers, without coat or collar, to fetch the two bottles and smell the day's early odors before dust and muck fill the air. But from October to May it wasn't so pleasant. A man, even in an overcoat, can get quite chilled going out before sunrise, before he gets a cup of hot tea or cocoa inside him. And in real freezing weather—well, it was a nuisance, that's all I can say.

When milk freezes, as it does quickly enough at zero or five or ten below, it takes a while to thaw out, but that's not the worst of it. It tastes different afterward, I don't care what Ada—that's my wife—says. And no matter how carefully you let it warm up, the cream slops over and makes a mess. The frozen milk expands, of course, and forces the cream up out of the neck, bearing the bottle cap ahead of it. Not to be indelicate, it looks quite disgusting.

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I couldn't expect the dairy to change its delivery hours to suit me; on the other hand they couldn't expect me to get up at four to wait in shivering darkness for the tinkle of the bells on Macwinney's horse plodding over the packed snow, the sleigh runners giving out faint squeaks as they slid and slithered. I toyed with the idea of buying our milk at the grocer's, but we kept the flat nice and warm, even at night, and of course didn't use the icebox in winter, and both Ada and I like our milk fresh. It was a problem. I hesitated to discuss it with Macwinney; to tell the truth, the fellow was familiar, not to say insolent. Besides, when he came around in the daytime to collect his bill, which would have been the logical time to talk over the issue, I was at the office; I couldn't expect Ada to put the matter with the same force and clarity I would.

Then happily—so it seemed at the time—Jacques Sengalt showed up. It was on a Sunday, not too long before dinner—I could smell the roast from the parlor, even though Ada had closed both the hall and kitchen doors—the first week in January. Of this I'm sure, despite Ada's conviction that it was later. The doorbell rang and I opened it. He was standing inside the vestibule, a tall fellow with a sharp thin nose curving downward, dressed in a heavy pea jacket, with a woolen stocking cap pulled over his ears. In the dim unheated vestibule his breath came in white puffs.

"I am Jacques Sengalt," he stated abruptly, "driver for the Cithere Dairy."

"Yes?" I prompted, shivering a bit in the chill.

"I could be your milkman," he said; "Cithere has milk, cream, cheese, buttermilk."

"We take from the Mount Royal."

He nodded. "I know. But your milk freezes every morning, eh?"

I shivered again. "You better come inside. Wipe your feet on the mat."

He wiped his feet carefully and stepped inside, taking off his cap to reveal an unexpectedly high forehead with his hair coming far down in a widow's peak. He was clean-shaven, but the black of his beard showed through his white cheeks. He stood glancing appraisingly around the parlor—we had a nice little Turkish cozy-corner with red hangings and punkahs (I believe they call them, something like upside-down brooms) to hold them artistically in place—while I sat down again in the Morris chair.

"Doesn't your milk freeze in cold weather?" I asked—jokingly, you understand.

"Naturally it freezes. But I can bring it up the stairs."

This was exactly what I had once thought of asking Macwin-

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ney but knowing how independent he was, I had simply avoided the annoyance of having words with him. And here was Sengalt offering the convenience.

"I can put it inside the outer door for you."

"Oh no," I said. "That won't be necessary." Like everyone else we kept the vestibule locked at night; I wasn't going to have it open even to ensure unfrozen milk. "Just leave it on the top step. You can start Monday—no, that's tomorrow, isn't it? A week from Monday, say; that will give us time to stop the Mount Royal."

"I have already told the Mount Royal driver you would not need his milk longer," said Sengalt casually. "I shall deliver tomorrow."

"You have already—" I was between anger at his presumption and astonishment at his assurance. "How the devil could you be certain we'd take from you?"

He gave me a barely perceptible bow, more arrogant than humble. "Mount Royal left your milk on the street to freeze; I shall bring it up the stairs. How could you do anything else than change from Mount Royal to Cithere?"

"Still, you took a lot upon yourself," I grumbled. I like people to know their place; in all the years I've worked for the Grand Trunk—and they are certainly enough to permit me to take a liberty or two if I were that type—I've never stepped over the line or ventured to make decisions which were properly the province of my superiors.

He shrugged slightly and said nothing.

"Oh, all right," I agreed at last; "you can start tomorrow, then. A pint of milk and a half pint of cream. I hope your cream is good and thick."

He drew himself up with—the word was ridiculous, but it was the only one I could think of—with dignity. "Cithere cream is absolutely best," he said. "You can spread it." He gave the same trifling bow as before, replaced his cap, and left.

I must say I was surprised by Ada's attitude when I told her about Sengalt. She called me a busybody and an old woman with nothing better to do than meddle in household affairs. When I remonstrated mildly that it was I, after all, who paid the bills and fetched the milk in the morning, so I was hardly meddling, she changed her attack, insisting I was endangering her health by chopping and changing and experimenting. She vowed she would never touch the new milk, and was, I think, about to become even more vehement when we both smelt the roast burning. This ended the argument for the moment, but the rest of the day was filled with gusts of quarreling, which was quite upsetting.

That night we had a flurry or

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two of snow, so it wasn't cold as it might have been; Cithere's milk and cream sat snugly on the top step, the bottle caps neatly in place. I put the kettle on for a cup of tea; meanwhile I tried a bit of the cream on the tip of a spoon. It was delicious.

Delicious is a completely inadequate description. It was to ordinary cream—no, to the best, heaviest whipping cream—as cream is to milk. It was sweet without being in the least cloying; it had that zest and piquancy, that taste of more, associated with —I speak from hearsay, having been a strict teetotaler all my life —with the best spirits.

I was so pleased I overlooked Ada's temper of yesterday; I made her a cup of strong tea in which I put a good dollop of the cream and spread more of it on a nice piece of toast and took it to her. She looked in sleepy irritation at me, but before she could protest at being waked I coaxed her into taking a bit of toast and a sip of tea.

"Why," she exclaimed, "whatever have you done? I've never tasted anything like this in my life."

"Nor I," I said. "It's the new milkman. Quite a find, if the quality is always up to this."

She frowned at being reminded that I had changed dairies without consulting her. Then she took another bite of toast and another sip of tea. "It was clever of you, Edwin dear. I can't think how we put up with the Mount Royal and that brute of a driver all this while."

She finished the tea, jumped out of bed and made me a nice hot breakfast: oatmeal on which I poured Cithere's milk generously —and let me say the milk was just what could have been expected after the cream—French toast, and cocoa, to which I'm particularly partial. I felt like a new man, as they say, as I buckled on my overshoes, kissed Ada, who responded with unaccustomed warmth, and walked briskly over to St. Catherine Street for the trolley.

There was a young lady waiting there before me, a rather pretty young lady. I don't know what possessed me—for I'm assuredly not the type of man who speaks to strangers, much less to unknown women who might easily misunderstand—but I tipped my derby and said, "Lovely day, isn't it?"

We chatted for a moment—I had to take off my ear muffs to hear plainly—and then the Windsor car came along and I helped her aboard. Altogether naturally we took the same seat and continued our casual conversation, which began to have almost flirtatious overtones. It was absolutely innocent, but very pleasant—we did not exchange names and I never saw her again—and when I got

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off at St. James Street I was quite set up. Indeed I had a glow that didn't disappear all day.

That evening Ada was in a gay mood. Macwinney had come to collect for the Mount Royal, and seemed rather put out at first, but after a while he went off thoroughly satisfied.

"Knows his milk isn't a patch on Cithere's," I grunted. "That is, if Cithere's is always as good."

It was. Next morning's was just as rich and tasty. I met no pretty young ladies, but Guy Worter—our senior clerk, and a bit standoffish—came to my desk to pass the time of day. I never knew him to be so affable before.

It began snowing that afternoon and I could tell we were in for a heavy fall, two or three days of it. I like the snow but I'm not keen on shoveling it and I didn't look forward to clearing our steps. The ground-floor tenant took care of the sidewalk, usually by scattering ashes and cinders, but we had a sort of unspoken agreement that the snow from our stairs was not to be dumped on his territory but moved out into the street. I stood the wooden shovel in the vestibule and laid my heavy mittens out on the hall rack.

Peering through the double windows first thing, even though it was still dark, I could see the snow still coming down heavily. Gloomily I went for the milk, resolved to get the shoveling over and done with before I allowed myself the relaxation of a cup of tea.

Opening the vestibule door gingerly, expecting the piled snow to fall inward around me, I was surprised to find the top step bare except for the bottles. Flakes from the latest fall eddied in the slight breeze but it had obviously been cleared within the hour. So—as near as I could tell in the faint light reflected by the snow—had the whole flight. Right down to the street.

"Well," I said. "My goodness!"

It was beyond reason that Jacques Sengalt had shoveled the snow; whoever heard of a milkman doing such a thing? Yet if he hadn't, who had? If he stopped and cleared the fall at each customer's he'd never get through his rounds; if it was a favor reserved for a special few, why should we be included? I puzzled over the mystery all during breakfast—I saw no reason to trouble Ada with it—and though I came to no solution, I felt much better afterward. Walking through streets clean with fresh snow always raises my spirits.

Snow fell all day, but next morning the steps were clear again. For the first time I broke my rule of never discussing anything but business or the weather at the office and asked several of the men what dairy they took from. Perhaps I was encouraged in this by everyone's new friendliness.

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However most of them had no idea whose milk was left at their doors; other took from Maple Leaf, St. Denis, Mount Royal or Dominion. No one apparently patronized Cithere nor even heard of them.

Well, I thought, probably they've just gone into business and are anxious to build up a reputation. Not satisfied with selling the best milk and cream, their drivers perform little services for the customers. And being new they have few patrons so the drivers can afford the time to shovel stairways or stoops.

Just the same, I resolved to be up early next morning if the snow continued, to see if I could catch Sengalt at his work. I was grateful, but it did seem in a way to be a liberty. Not even asking if I wanted the steps cleared at all.

It was a near blizzard and I began to wonder if I was really so anxious to confront Sengalt and ask for an explanation. Nevertheless, I got up at four and went down the inside back stairs—mighty drafty they were, too—and built up the furnace. I shivered for a while until the hot-water pipes clanked into warmth. The snow had stopped and the moon was dazzling. Looking at the bend in the stairs from the parlor window—the only place they were visible from unless I wanted to risk frostbite by sticking my nose outdoors—I saw they were piled high. Hovering close to the heat, I listened for the tinkle of Sengalt's sleigh bells.

I heard bells soon enough and rushed to the window, but it was Macwinney and the Mount Royal, swerving past at a trôt. Next came the Dominion man, running across the street to leave his wares on two adjoining stoops, returning to his slowly ambling horse still on the run, beating his arms over his chest.

Sengalt, no doubt delayed by his shoveling chores for customers ahead of us, ought to be along soon. I listened intently, wondering why I had pulled myself out of a comfortable bed just to get valueless information. I yawned and stretched and listened, hearing nothing.

At last an impulse moved me to put on my overcoat and go to the vestibule door. The steps were clean of snow; our milk and cream stood in the usual place.

Had I drowsed? The fact that I had been standing made it unlikely. Perhaps Cithere's sleigh had no bells—whoever heard of one without?—and Sengalt had done his work swiftly and silently—preposterously swiftly and unbelievably silently for me to have been utterly unaware. Distinctly annoyed at the unnecessary mystery, I took in the milk and went back to bed.

It was clear that day, growing colder by the hour. At the office we took turns bundling up and go-

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ing outside to read the big thermometer and report its steady descent. The wind whistling through the steel girders of the Victoria Bridge must have gained added chill from them before sweeping across the Place d'Armes and up Beaver Hall Hill on its way to Westmount and Ottawa. Going home in the packed trolley, despite wraps and close proximity and the iron stove the conductor kept replenishing, the passengers shivered uncontrollably. I was glad indeed to reach the coziness of Bishop Street and the hot bowl of oyster stew Ada had waiting for me.

Listening to the wind and knowing how the temperature was dropping, I regretted Sengalt's offer to leave the milk inside the vestibule. After all, the front door was firmly locked and bolted; no harm would come to anything but habit if the vestibule were left unlatched. There was no use doing it now; no milkman, no matter how obliging, would think to try the handle. I resigned myself to frozen milk in the morning.

I slept heavily and late. For once Ada was up before me. I didn't waken till she brought me a cup of tea.

"Hullo," I said. "This is nice of you." And indeed it was; I could not recall her having done such a thing before. But she had been unusually considerate during the past few days, and affectionate, surprisingly, for she had never been the demonstrative sort. "I suppose the cream made a mess thawing out."

"Why no. Nothing was frozen; the bottles were in the vestibule."

"What!"

"Yes. Didn't you leave the door unlocked for him?"

"Ada," I said, "I swear solemnly I locked the door last night as I've done every other night."

"Oh, you must have just thought you had."

I shook my head. I knew I'd locked the door—all the more positive for having considered leaving it unlatched. That night I made Ada witness my locking up; next morning the bottles were inside again.

I wonder now, looking back, that I was not more upset. I was disturbed over the mysterious goings on, and anxious to get an explanation, but I was also complacent. I was convinced there was a normal and natural explanation and that everything was for the best.

Saturday night the weather turned mild, and next morning the bottles were back in the old place at the head of the stairs. We expected Sengalt to come around with his bill Monday or Tuesday, but he didn't show up. "Well," I said, "he'll be here during the week; Cithere isn't in business just for fun."

I had other things than milk to

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think about: I got the first raise in years—and without asking for it either—and Ada and I debated between going to the theatre to celebrate or having a nice little dinner somewhere.

The raise was the more unexpected because, though perfectly conscious of always having done my work and more, I had felt for a long time—up until the past week in fact—that I wasn't popular at the office, either with the men or the heads. I had earned the raise but I hadn't anticpated getting it.

Coincidently—and this had nothing to do with our good fortune because we kept it to ourselves—several neighbors who had never been particularly friendly with Ada invited her to tea or came visiting, so she found herself busy with new acquaintances and new activities.

One day she remarked, "You know that milkman never *has* brought his bill."

"Maybe their accounts run by the month. That would be next week, wouldn't it?"

Before next week came it turned bitter cold again; the snow the sun had melted on the roofs hung in long, sharp, dangerous icicles. Again we found our milk and cream inside the locked vestibule.

In spite of our feeling that Sengalt meant no harm by his tricks, I must admit I was now thoroughly irritated. No one lies petty mysteries; when they revolve around favors they become all the more annoying since one is put in a position of ingratitude as well as befuddlement. I resolved firmly that if I couldn't catch Sengalt I would go direct to the office of Cithere and demand an explanation.

Meanwhile the cold snap developed into one of the worst I remembered. Unwary venturers were taken to hospitals with frozen fingers and toes; horses broke their legs on the icy streets; fires in overheated houses sent inmates to their death of pneumonia outside. For all my stoking the furnace the Bishop Street flat was chilly; we sat wrapped up through the evening and were glad when the first moment came to get into bed with hot-water bottles and extra comforters.

Under the circumstances I hardly expected milk deliveries to continue, but Cithere at least was undaunted by the weather. The milk would have frozen, even inside the vestibule; on the first morning of the awful cold I found the bottles in the hall, well away from the icy draft sweeping under the locked and bolted front door.

I was shaken. The vestibule opened with an ordinary key; almost any would fit it, and it was possible Sengalt had such a one. But our front door had a patent lock; no key but one made for it would move the tumblers. And there was a bolt and night latch.

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Admitted that the milkman's activities had been benevolent, the fact remained that someone could get into our home.

I sat down immediately to write a letter. I got as far as "Cithere Dairy" when I realized I didn't know their address. I wasn't even sure they were in Montreal proper; their plant might be in Verdun, Lachine, Dorval, St. Lambert or anywhere nearby. Well, I would look them up in the directory at the office on the following day; I wasn't going to be balked.

There was no Cithere Dairy in the Montreal directory. The office provided directories of every city in Canada; there was no Cithere listed in the whole of Quebec or Ontario. There was no Sengalt either.

I revived my hypothesis that Cithere was newly in business, too new to be listed. I wrote out the letter on Grand Trunk stationery in my lunch hour, demanding an explanation, directing it simply, Cithere Dairy, Montreal or vicinity. The Dominion Post Office could track down the address.

At home that night, with the matter off my hands for the moment, I felt slightly frivolous and Ada and I sat up past our usual time, playing cribbage. This rather reckless gaiety continued through the next day. Ada repudiated our usual plain week-day fare in favor of some fresh venison from Gatehouse's and I didn't even feel called on to protest the extravagance. On the contrary, matching her mood, I stoked the furnace quite as though coal hadn't gone up to six dollars a ton, and the pipes in the parlor gave out heat enough to bask in rather than huddle over.

I might have known that lightheartedness like this could only preface disaster; sure enough, the hot-water pipes sprung a leak, spraying the sofa and carpet before I could shut them off. We went to bed morosely, faced not only with a flat no longer cozy except for the kitchen, but with the prospect of a plumber's and upholsterer's bill as well.

With this new trouble on top of the weather you would think I'd have other things on my mind besides Cithere and Sengalt. Yet I had a nightmare of the milkman coming into our bedroom, his haughty features perfectly clear in the moonlight. I dreamed he pulled the bedclothes a little higher about us, patting the coverlet gently into place before leaving as I struggled to wake myself, trying at least to make some sort of noise in my paralyzed throat.

Released at last from my helplessness, I woke, sprang out of bed, got into my dressing gown and slippers. I went into the kitchen and lit the gas. It was five forty-five. Some impulse led me to the parlor.

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Instead of being frightfully cold it was warm—almost as warm as it had been just before the pipe burst. I lit the gaselier and stared about me. The disorder left by my scurrying around after the accident had been righted. Everything was in place; there were no marks of water, nor any sign of the damage so apparent a few hours earlier. The carpet, so far as I could tell by gaslight, was unstained, nor was it damp to the touch. The same was true of the sofa, whose upholstery and fringes actually seemed fresher than before.

I walked rather dazedly over to the water pipes. The break in the iron had been distinctly visible; now the gilt surface was unmarred. Even if some strange metallic response to temperature or pressure changes caused it to seal itself there was no explanation of how the heat got turned back on.

I looked helplessly at the floor. Close by the knob used to open and shut off the water were our milk and cream from the Cithere Dairy.

When Ada followed me into the parlor and saw the bottles, she began to shake. "Edwin, I'm frightened."

So was I, of course, but I tried to soothe her. Whatever lay behind the riddle of Sengalt, I pointed out, he had done us no harm. On the contrary, no matter how clumsily carried out, his intentions seemed to have been directed to our good.

"That's just it," she exclaimed. "You don't understand. But I've been thinking about it. Why should he—whatever he is—pick us out? And that milk—suppose it's like some sort of drug and we become *addicted* to it?"

"You're right," I said soberly. "I hadn't thought of it that way. I'll do something about it—today."

"Oh, Edwin—"

"Today," I repeated firmly.

On my desk at the office I found the letter to Cithere returned with the notation, "Unknown." I went to Mr. Fred Duncan's office and asked for the rest of the day off, promising to make up the work. He was most cordial, asking pleasantly after Ada.

I went immediately to the police station. The sergeant had no knowledge of any Cithere Dairy. Did I wish to lodge a complaint? No, I decided, I just wanted to find them. Why didn't I consult the Health Department then? They kept an eye on companies selling milk.

The Health Department had an up-to-date list of everyone dealing in milk, cream or cheese within fifty miles of Montreal. It even included farmers with a single cow, who irregularly retailed its milk. Neither Cithere nor Sengalt were on it.

As a last resort I sought out

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Macwinney and asked him if he remembered the driver from Cithere who told him we wouldn't be taking from the Mount Royal any longer. He looked at me insolently. "I don't know what you're talking about; no driver told me—the note was in your own milk bottles."

I went home to Bishop Street and helped Ada pack a couple of bags. "We'll get out of here," I said. "At least till I run down Sengalt."

We took a sleigh to the Windsor House. I really couldn't afford it, but it was luxurious; we felt reckless and gay, but not in the way we had just before the pipes burst. Now there was a certain furtiveness to our gaiety, a spice of wickedness, as though we weren't—as I assure you most emphatically we were—legally married.

Next day, after work, I went back to the flat for some things forgotten in our haste. No milk had been delivered, unless someone had stolen it when it wasn't taken in.

We stayed at the Windsor for two weeks. During that time I went around to all the local dairies enquiring if they knew of Cithere. I rang every doorbell on Bishop Street to find out if Sengalt had asked them to take milk from him. I consulted the tax collector, feed merchants, blacksmiths who might have shod Sengalt's horse or repaired the tires on his wagon. I went to the offices of the Gazette and the Star. No one had heard of Cithere or Sengalt. Frequent trips to Bishop Street, before going to the office, confirmed that no milk had been left in our absence.

We couldn't continue staying at the Windsor House. It was not only expensive; it was absurd to be driven from our flat. Besides, the deliveries having stopped, it was unlikely Sengalt would trouble us again. At the end of the second week we returned.

The worst of the winter was over. The snow melted to slush in the streets; icicles fell periodically with deadly plops into the shrinking snow or shattered on hard surfaces into brittle fragments. The flat was cozy again. We began to wonder if anything out of the ordinary had ever happened at all—anything, that is, that couldn't be accounted for by a combination of eccentricity and coincidence.

The next morning I was up at six or so. I put the kettle on and, perhaps out of habit, went to the front door. On the top step were the familiar bottles.

This time we fled from Bishop Street for good. We found another flat on Atwater Avenue and sublet ours to a young couple. I'm sure they wondered why I came around so often and asked so insistently if anyone had solicited them to buy milk or left bottles

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they hadn't ordered. Since nothing like this had happened they must have thought me touched on the subject.

For a long time we feared Sengalt might find us out in our new quarters; each ring at the door made us look anxiously at each other before answering. But we were never bothered.

Nor have I heard of anone else who had any contact with the Cithere Dairy. We often wonder about it, and speculate if we suffered some sort of hallucination. Still, we remember the taste of that milk and cream so distinctly —all others are a disappointment now—it is hard to believe that experience was not real.

Atwater Avenue is neither so convenient nor homey as Bishop Street, even with our cozy-corner setup there, nor do things generally seem as nice as they were. I notice the men at the office appear to be growing less cordial, resuming their old aloofness toward me, and I have several times been the victim of petty backbiting and envy. Ada's new acquaintances more or less dropped her after we moved. Perhaps the distance was too far, though this would not explain why she was treated rather coolly on visits back to the old neighborhood. I don't know, she does not confide much in me. Our evenings are generally silent, unless broken by the spats I suppose every married couple has.

Yesterday, waiting for the Windsor car, perhaps moved by the thought of the trilliums blooming up on the mountain, or the smell of late spring, I spoke to a lady. Just to be pleasant, you understand; there was nothing ulterior in my remark about the lovely weather we were having at all, because I'm not that sort of man.

Anyway she was neither particularly young nor pretty. Not that that matters, for if you have anything of the milk of human kindness in you at all you don't pay too much attention to appearances. That's why I was rather upset when she turned her face disdainfully away.

COMING NEXT MONTH

Marque and Reprisal, **the first of three short novels by** ***POUL ANDERSON***

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The great triangular blade of the guillotine *weighs sixty kilos, makes its descent in three-quarters of a second, and on April 25, 1792 nimbly clipped off its first head. These are the facts. For the real inside dope on the Terror of the Revolution (as well as on several other dusty corners of history) we refer you below. There you will read the strange account of Professor Ephraim Hackachinik, who made a study of the tiny beginnings of history's great events. He did not live long enough to regret his curiosity.*

FAMOUS FIRST WORDS

by Harry Harrison

MILLIONS OF WORDS OF HATRED, vitriol and polemic have been written denegating, berating and castigating the late Professor Ephraim Hakachinik, and I feel that the time has come when the record must be put straight. I realize that I too am risking the wrath of the so-called authorities by speaking out like this, but I have been silent too long. I must explain the truth as my mentor explained it to me because only the truth, lunatic as it may sound, can correct the false impressions that have become accepted coin in reference to the professor.

Let me be frank; early in our relationship I too felt that the professor was—how shall we call it—eccentric even beyond the accepted norm for the faculty of backwater universities. In appearance he was a most untidy man almost hidden behind a vast mattress of tangled beard that he affected for the dual purpose of saving the trouble and the expense of shaving and to dispense with the necessity of wearing a necktie. This duality of purpose was common in most everything he did; I am sure that simultaneous professorships in both the arts and in the sciences is so rare as to be almost unique, yet he occupied two chairs at Miskatonic University, those of Quantum Physics and Conversational Indo-European. This juxtaposition of abilities undoubtedly led to the perfection of his invention and the discovery of the techniques needed to develop its possibilities.

As a graduate student I was very close to Prof. Hakachinik and was present at the very moment

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when the germ of an idea was planted that was to eventually flower into the tremendous growth of invention that was to be his contribution to the sum of knowledge of mankind. It was a sunny June afternoon and I am forced to admit that I was dozing over a repetitious (begat, begat, begat) fragment of Dead Sea Scroll when a hoarse shout echoed from the paneled walls of the library and shocked me awake.

"Neobican!" the professor exclaimed again, he has a tendency to break into Serbo-Croatian when excited, and a third time, "Neobican!"

"What is wonderful, professor?" I asked.

"Listen to this quotation, it is inspirational, by Edward Gibbon, he was visiting Rome, and this is what he wrote:

"As I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter . . . the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind."

"Isn't that wonderful my boy, simply breath-taking, a real historical beginning if I ever heard one. It all started there and twelve years and 500,000 words later, wracked by writer's cramp, Gibbon scribbled *The End* and dropped his pen. *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was finished. Inspiring!"

"Inspiring?" I asked dimly, head still rattling with begats.

"Dolt!" he snarled, and added a few imprecations in Babylonian that will not bear translation in a modern journal. "Have you no sense of perspective? Do you not see that every great event in this universe must have had some tiny beginning?"

"That's rather an obvious observation," I remarked.

"Imbecile!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "Do you not understand the grandeur of the concept! The mighty Redwood piercing the sky and so wide in the trunk it is pierced with a tunnel for motor vehicles to be driven through, this goliath of the forests was once a struggling, single-leafed shrub incapable of exercising a tree's peculiar attractions for even the most miniscule of dogs. Do you not find this concept a fascinating one?"

I mumbled something incoherent to cover up the fact that I did not, and as soon as Prof. Hakachinik had turned away I resumed my nap and study of the scroll and forgot the matter completely for a number of days, until I received a message summoning me to the professor's chambers.

"Look at that," he said, pointing to what appeared to be a normal radio housed in a crackle-grey cabinet and faced with a splendid display of knobs and dials.

"Bully!" I said with enthusiasm, "We will listen to the final

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game of the World Series together."

"Stumpfsinnig Schwein!" he growled, "That is no ordinary radio, it is an invention of mine embodying a new concept, my Temporal Audio Psychogenetic detector, TAP for short, and "tap" is what it does. By utilizing a theory and technique that are so far beyond your rudimentary powers of comprehension that I will make no attempt to explain them, I have constructed my TAP to detect and amplify the voices of the past so that they can be recorded. Listen and be amazed!"

The professor switched on the device and after a few minutes of fiddling with the dials exacted from the loudspeaker what might be described as a human voice mouthing harsh animal sounds.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Proto-mandarin of the latter part of the thirteenth century B.C., obviously," he mumbled, hard at work again on the dials, "but just idle chatter about the rice crop, the barbarians from the south and such. That is the difficulty, I have to listen to volumes of that sort of thing before I can chance on an authentic beginning and record it. But I have been doing just that—and succeeding!" he slapped his hand on a loose pile of scrawled pages that stood upon the desk. "Here are my first successes, fragmentary as yet, but I'm on the way. I have traced a number of important events back to their sources and recorded the very words of their originators at the precise moment of inception. Of course the translations are rough—and quite colloquial—but that can be corrected later. My study of beginnings has begun."

I'm afraid I left the professor's company then, I did want to hear the ball game, and regret to say that it was the last time that I—or anyone—ever saw him alive. The sheets of paper he so valued were taken to be the ravings of an unwell mind, their true worth misunderstood and they were discarded. I have salvaged some of them and now present them to the public who can truly judge their real worth. Fragmentary as they are, they cast the strong light of knowledge into many a darkened corner of history that has been obscured in the past.

". . . even though it is a palace it is still my home, and it is too small by far with my new stepmother who is a *bitz**. I had hoped to continue in my philosophy studies, but it is impossible here. Guess I better run the army down to the border, there may be trouble there . . ."

Alexander of Macedonia—
336 B.C.

* *Thought to refer to the* peetz, *a small desert bird, but the reference is obscure.*

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". . . hot is not Ye words for it, and alle of VIRGINIA is like an Oven this summer. When Opportunity arose to earn a little l.s.d. running a Survey line through the hills I grabbed it before M.F. could change his Minde. That is how I met ..... today (forgot his name, must ask him tomorrow) in the Taverne. We did have an Ale together and did both complain mightily upon the Heat. With one thing leading to Another as they are wont to do, we had more Ales and he did confide in me. He is a member of a secret club named, I *think* since Memory is hazy here, The Sons of Liberty, or some such . . ."

George Washington—1765

"France has lost its greatness when an honest inventor gains no profit from his onerous toil. I have neglected my practice for months now, perfecting my Handy Hacker Supreme Salami Slicer. I should have earned a fortune selling the small models to every butcher in France. But no!—the Convention uses the large model without paying a sou to me, and the butchers are naturally reluctant now to purchase . . ."

J. I. Guillotin, M.D.—1791

"My head doth ache as though I suffereth an ague, and if I ever chance on the slippery-fingered soddish son of an ill-tempered whore who dropped that night-vessel in Fetter Lane, I will roundly thrash him to within an inch of his life, and perhaps a bit beyond. Since arrival in London I have learned the neatness of step and dexterity of motion needed to avoid the contents of the many vessels emptied into the street, but this is the first time there was need to dodge the container itself. Had I moved a trifle quicker this body of the crockery in motion would have continued in motion. But my head at rest brought it to rest and there was a reaction. . . . My head doth ache. As soon as it is better I must think on this, there is the shade of an idea here."

Sir Isaac Newton—1682

"I. is afraid that F. knows! If he does I have had it. If I. was not so seductively attractive I would find someone else's bed, but she does lead me on so. She says she can sell some of her jewelry and buy those three ships she was looking at. The last place I want to go is the damn spice islands, right now at the height of the Madrid season. But F. *is* king, and if he finds out . . .!"

(Attributed to Cristoforo Colombo of Genoa, 1492; but derivation is obscure.)

"Am I glad I got little Pierre the Erector Set. As soon as he is asleep I'll grab the funny tower he just made. I know the Exposition committee won't use anything like

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this, but it will keep them quiet for awhile."

Alexandre Gustave Eiffel—1888

"Woe unto China! Crop failures continue this year and the Depression is getting worse. Millions unemployed. The only plan that seems at all workable is this construction project that Wah Ping-Ah is so hot about. He says it will give a shot in the arm to the economy and get the cash circulating again. But what a screwball idea! Build a wall 1,500 miles long! He wants to use his own initials and call it the W.P.A. project, but I'm going to call it something different and tell the people it's to keep the barbarians out, as you can always sell them on defense appropriations if you scare them enough."

Emperor Shih Hwang-ti—252 B.C.

"There will be a full moon tonight so I'll have enough light to find that balcony. I hate to take a chance going near that crazy family, but Maria is the hottest piece of baggage in town! She made her kid sister Julie—the buck-toothed wonder!—promise to have the window unlocked."

Romeus Montague—1562

(Extract from the ship's log.) "Made a landfall today on a hunk of rock. What navigation! We head for Virginia and end up in Massachusetts! If I ever catch the Quaker brat who stole the compass . . .!!!"

Brig Mayflower—1620

There are many more like this, but these samples will suffice to prove that Prof. Hakachinik was a genius far ahead of his time, and a man to whom the students of history owe an immeasurable debt.

Since there have been many rumors about the professor's death I wish to go on record now and state the entire truth. I was the one who discovered the professor's body so I know whereof I speak. It is a lie and a canard that the good man committed suicide, indeed he was in love with life and was cut off in his prime, and I'm sure he looked forward to many more productive years. Nor was he electrocuted, though his TAP machine was close by and fused and melted as though a singularly large electrical current had flowed through it. The official records read heart failure and for wont of a better word this description will have to stand, though in all truth the cause of death was never determined. The professor appeared to be in fine health and in the pink of condition, though of course he was dead. Since his heart was no longer beating, heart failure seemed to be a satisfactory cause of death to enter into the records.

In closing let me state that when

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I discovered the professor he was seated at his desk his head cocked towards the loudspeaker and his pen clutched in his fingers. Under his hand was a writing pad with an incomplete entry, what he appeared to be writing when death struck. I make no conclusions about this, but merely record it as a statement of fact.

The writing is in Old Norse which, for the benefit of those not acquainted with this interesting language, I have translated into modern English.

". . . this meeting will come to order and if you don't put those mead horns away there'll be a few cracked skulls around here, I tell you. Now, order of business. There have been some reports of tent caterpillars in Yggdrasill and some dead branches, but we'll get onto that later. Of more pressing interest is the sandy concrete that has been found cracking in the foundations of Bifrost Bridge. I want to—just one moment—this is supposed to be a closed meeting and I notice that there is someone listening in. Thor, will you please take care of that eavesdropper. . ."

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THE BIOLASER

by Theodore L. Thomas

THE LASER AMPLIFIES AN INITIAL pulse of light into a powerful beam. The laser also places that beam in condition to be focused to a tiny spot without loss of energy. Such concentration of energy easily causes steel to spurt off as a vapor. It didn't take the medical doctors long to see the surgical possibilities of the laser.

For one thing, the laser has been used to weld a detached retina to its support. The laser beam passes harmlessly through the transparent portion of the eye and releases its energy at the edge of the black retina.

But there is more.

A red blood cell runs about 8 microns in diameter. A laser beam can be focused to a spot about one-third of a micron in diameter. As a surgical knife, it is possible for the laser to cut away diseased tissue while leaving unharmed the healthy tissue that is only one cell diameter away. The doctors are already referring to the laser as a cutting tool of infinite thinness.

Experimentation is now going on to use the laser with a device called the ventriculoscope. This device is a kind of telescope that allows the surgeon to examine certain cavities inside the human brain. The light from a laser can be piped through tiny glass fibers, and the piped light can destroy tumors in these brain cavities. It may also be possible to control the purposeless movements of Parkinson's disease by destroying the right tissue. Hormonal disorders may be improved by controlled destruction of portions of the pituitary gland.

If the improvement in laser focusing continues, we may have a tool that can eliminate predetermined sites in the DNA in a chromosome. With additional control of the energy in the tiny beam, it may become possible to replace the burned-out portion of a spiral of DNA with a selected amino acid. The beam could supply the energy to force the reaction of the amino acid at each of its two reactive sites —to fuse it into the DNA, as it were. And there you have it: the total ability to control heredity.

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The author of the little gem below is a 29-year-old mathematics instructor at a Vermont college. He writes: "Have always had a left-handed view of Mathematics. Too many words have been written of its Beauty; my love and respect lie in its Irony. I would consider Writing my avocation but fully realize that only Full Professors have avocations, that only Associate Professors have hobbies—that what I'm doing is just fooling around." And a good thing, too, we say. Who knows what might happen if Mr. Kurosaka took himself seriously (see below).

THOSE WHO CAN, DO

by Bob Kurosaka

THE SEMESTER BEGAN IN ITS traditionally chaotic manner. Class cards were lost; students wandered aimlessly through the lecture hall. An occasional *oh* punctuated my lecture, followed by the fumbling exit of a blushing student, suddenly realizing the course is Differential Equations, not Introduction to Philosophy.

After announcing the required texts and papers, I asked the usual "Are there any questions?" If there were none, I could catch the 11:20 bus to Weavertown; there would be time for a short round of golf.

A student rose and jammed his hands into his back pockets. "Professor, why do we have to take this course?"

An uneasy murmur rose from the class, a nervous shuffling of feet.

"What is your name, young man?" I asked.

"Barone, sir. Frank Barone."

"Well, Mr. Barone, the University requires that all those majoring in Mathematics complete a minimum of . . ."

"I know that!" he interrupted, then added quickly, "sir."

I smiled and nodded.

"I mean," he continued, "is there any practical use in studying totally abstract concepts? What I need is a guide to being a contributing member of society."

I concluded that he was a refugee from Philosophy, but his deep voice and confident manner had

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enchanted the class. The other students were awaiting my answer. I cleared my throat.

"Mr. Barone," I began, "what do you want from the University?"

"I'm not sure, sir. I thought two years of college would help me decide on a career, but it hasn't. You see, *I don't have to work for a living.*"

He said it as simply as you or I would say, "I'm having trouble with my teeth."

"And how will you obtain the essentials of life, Mr. Barone?"

"Well, sir, I have a . . . a gift."

"Indeed," I chuckled. "The Midas Touch, perhaps?"

I immediately regretted my sarcasm. Barone's face turned red. He had confessed a matter of great personal importance and I had ridiculed him.

"Better than that, professor!" he called. "Watch!"

Barone raised a hand and pointed at me. My lectern rose silently and hovered above my head. I heard a gasp. I turned in time to see Barone gesturing at a shapely coed. She was trying to cover her nakedness with her notebook.

"Mr. Barone!" I shouted. "That will be enough!"

"Not yet, professor!"

He waved and clutched as if catching a butterfly. When he opened his hands, a swarm of bats flew out, careening wildly about the lecture hall. Coeds screamed and dove under their chairs.

Barone had to be stopped. I took a deep breath and shouted, *"Stop!"*

The room hushed suddenly; everyone froze. Only the whispering flight of the bats and the naked girl's whimpering broke the heavy silence. All eyes were on me, even Barone's. This had to be good.

I pointed at the lectern and brought it down gently. A quick gesture returned the girl's clothes.

I clasped my hands together and concentrated. I opened them and released the falcons. They swept the air clean of bats and returned to my hand, obediently vanishing.

The class was a single open mouth. It was time to break the tension.

"Are there any other questions?"

The students shook their heads numbly. Only Barone remained motionless.

"Very well. Read page three through seventeen for next time. Do all problems on page seventeen. That will be all for today."

The class filed out quietly. Barone, the last to leave, hesitated by the rear doors of the lecture hall. He turned and looked back. We studied each other for several seconds. Then, as if making a decision, he nodded grimly. He flashed me a smile and walked out humming.

I let out my breath and gathered my notes. As I left the lecture hall, I glanced at my watch. 11:30.

Maybe I can catch the 1:15 bus.

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Here is a moving and sensitive story by Edgar Pangborn. It is about an Average Man and an Average Woman—but as we all (unless you think in graphs) know, such people do not exist.

WOGGLEBEAST

by Edgar Pangborn

MOLLY TROTTED THE TWO blocks from the supermarket with a roasting chicken for Sunday. Her round blue eyes were tranced with planning. Paper skirts on the drumsticks, toothpick legs for the olives; the raw carrots Danny liked could be cut in funny shapes. Then cold cuts for Sunday supper, and the bones could be boiled up for soup on Sunday evening while they looked at the T.V. or had a game of checkers.

Molly McManus enjoyed the rest of the Friday. She polished the living-room floor of the little house and put up two pairs of fresh curtains. Thanks to her planning ahead, she had time for a nice visit with Mrs. Perlman next door who was going to have still another baby. She remembered to quit humming when Danny got home because it sometimes got on his nerves—a foreman in an explosive plant cannot have nerves. But she continued humming inside. At dinner she had a pickle-animal. That's easy—you take a pickled onion for the head, slices of gherkin for the body, and the usual legs made out of toothpicks. Danny chuckled and admired it. Molly went to bed happy, folded up in gratitude against his weary bulk, and slept a while in peace.

He was tired, but over the weekend he could rest. Molly worried about his weight. He had no bay window, but there was a hint of it. Bags were showing under his mild gray eyes, and the eyes would redden if he forgot to put on his reading glasses. His step had grown heavy so gradually, one almost forgot how light on his feet he used to be. It seemed to Molly they ought to give him an office job. She woke for an hour or so in the night, thinking about that, watching the rosy reflection of a traffic light glow, die and glow again on the bedroom ceiling. He'd earned an office job. He ought to go straight up there and *tell* them.

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And she was oppressed also that night by a special familiar loneliness in her arms. She counted to eight a dozen times or so, synchronizing it with Danny's peaceful snoring, and murmured a prayer which had become little more than a wistful habit. She was forty-one; to have a child at this date would *need* a miracle.

Sunday was good, as planned. Rest had cleared away most of Danny's fatigue—in fact on Saturday he'd taken out his stamp collection and got her to admiring it, which happened only on his best days. Then at Sunday dinner-time, glorious juices rushed out of the chicken at the poke of Danny's carving knife, and the whole apartment wallowed in the golden-brown smell. Stuffed and sleepy-faced, Danny let out a hole in his belt, and Molly pretended not to notice—she was not slim herself. The afternoon darkened with February snow that would make driving unpleasant, so instead of taking off for the movies they worked on a crossword puzzle until Danny fell asleep trying to think of a Norse god. By evening they were ready for cold cuts. Molly McManus sat up after Danny got tired of watching T.V. and went to bed, to boil out the chicken bones and mend one of his shirts. In spite of the way everything encouraged you to do it, Molly hated wasting things. It seemed a little wicked as well as silly. . . .

It crouched on the kitchen table where it had fallen, or jumped, from the strainer full of other bones. Its thin arms reached toward Molly McManus as if in a bow or a supplication, and it looked like a Wogglebeast. "Why, the poor thing!" said Molly, and as she held out her finger toward its narrow friendly head it seemed to her that the Wogglebeast sat back on its sort-of legs and shook itself slightly—anyway there was a spatter of soup drops on the table-top that didn't necessarily come from the strainer.

She hated to disturb it. She dumped the other bones in the garbage and put away the soup, but let the kitchen table alone. She was always up before Danny to get his breakfast, and it wasn't as if they had cockroaches or ants. She slipped into bed thinking some about the Wogglebeast but more about Danny.

In her drowsiness she had left a few other things untidied; her sewing-basket, for instance, sitting with its lid off beside the genuine antique rocker in the kitchen. It had come from the old country with her grandmother, a basket of sweet-scented woven grass, the dry gold of it soft with age. When she got up early Monday morning she found the Wogglebeast nestled in this basket, and started to take it out, but although it didn't draw back, it seemed to her that it shook —not its head exactly.

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She placed the basket in the back of the silver drawer, leaving the drawer open a crack for air, until Danny had gone to work. Not that he would be unfriendly or unkind at all, but on work-day mornings he could not be quite with her; he never ignored her, but he had to be somehow arranging his thoughts and feelings for the trials and responsibilities of the day. She could see it happening, and help only by letting her alone. And also he was allergic to a number of things, cats and dogs for instance. And if she mentioned the Wogglebeast he might feel he had to do something about it. So—so anyway evening would be time enough.

During the day she made room at the back of the bottom bureau drawer for the Wogglebeast's basket. It was convenient; she could trot up to the bedroom from time to time to see if the little fellow needed anything. She offered it bread-crumbs, cornmeal, a few other things, but evidently it didn't need to eat, which was perhaps only natural. The bureau drawer remained open until she heard Danny drive into the garage, and as she was closing it she resolved to tell him. It really wasn't right or fair, not to.

But there had been a near-disaster at the plant. One of Danny's own crew had been careless, inexcusably careless—the man had to be fired. The whole episode was still oppressing Danny McManus like the brushing of black wings, and it was no time to be telling him about anything unusual.

Tuesday night some of the same trouble hung about him. He was grumbling that it was his own fault for not having trained the offender better.

Wednesday he was just tired out, falling asleep in his armchair, face collapsed above the drooped newspaper, defenseless and—well, not young.

By Thursday night Molly was beginning to feel a certain weight of guilt. If she spoke of the Wogglebeast Danny would rightly wonder why she hadn't done so sooner. Besides, it was acting very cooperative, the decent thing, always snug and quiet in the basket a bit before Danny was due home, although that Thursday it had been following her all over the house.

She thought Friday that it would have liked to go with her to the supermarket. But clearly the Wogglebeast itself knew that this couldn't be. It wasn't begging at all, just wistful, and when she got home it was waiting cheerfully in the kitchen and wagging—not its tail, exactly . . .

That afternoon she felt too lazy for the usual housework, and nearly drowsed off in the antique rocker, thinking a good deal about her grandmother, and how the old soul used to go on and on sometimes

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about the old country, talking high but soft like a small wind in the chimney, the way her dry laughter now and then would be the sparks of a comfortable burning log. Until—oh, maybe drowsing for sure—Molly heard her own self saying a few foolish things to the Wogglebeast that was resting in her arms: "It's not as if I ever thought you was a wishing thing exactly, only thinking to myself I am and talking like it might be to myself, but it's best we won't tell Danny at all, you wouldn't know the things he'd do. Too bad we haven't a child, too bad he won't be squaring off and *telling* them to give him office work the way he's earned it and could have it at the drop of a word—but it's only you can't help your mind running on it sometimes, and all . . ."

That night Danny desired her, like a young man but not heedless, and in the good quiet afterward Molly got up her courage to say a few little things about asking for office work, and though he wouldn't say yes or no he was peaceful and thoughtful about it, not annoyed at all. Once or twice, in the heavy dakrness after Danny had fallen asleep, she heard in the bureau drawer a tiny sigh not quite a grunt, very much like the noise a cat will make after turning around three times and settling down in a basket.

It wasn't until Easter Week that Danny found the Wogglebeast. He was already out of sorts, late for work, hunting a missing sock and getting mad instead of putting on another pair, and flinging himself in bullnecked impatience at all the bureau drawers, one foot in an untied shoe and the other bare entirely with all his toes angry. The Wogglebeast had been trying to hide under a brassiere. "Oh, that," Molly said—"oh, that, the little thing looked so much like a something, and wouldn't I be the one to go on playing with dolls at my age, see, the little legs he has and all?" The Wogglebeast never moved while Danny held it up; she was certain of that.

He put it back in the drawer. Not a word. He took another pair of socks. No word, no smile. He could be like that, and often it meant nothing except that he was puzzled. After he had gone Molly just made it to the bathroom, dizzy and sick.

Good and sick, but why? Surely his finding the Wogglebeast hadn't upset her that much. Something wrong with breakfast?—of course not. Unbelieving, merely touching the idea like a dab of cloud that was certain to float away, Molly counted days. How foolish can you get? And yet several times that day she studied her familiar round not-so-pretty face in the mirror, and something in her insisted that it *was* rather pretty: Softer anyhow, and brighter. A different look.

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Two days later she walked to the doctor's office, almost furtively, as if she hadn't as good a right as anybody to a rabbit test and all that.

The test said yes.

The doctor said other things beside yes, having known her fifteen years. It puzzled her that behind his professional cheerfulness he was obviously not pleased. When she called it a miracle the best he could offer was a one-sided smile and another string of cautions and good advice. It didn't matter. The choirs sang; her thoughts ran up and down a swaying bridge of rainbows all day long.

It was after the doctor's telephone call saying the test was positive and delivering the first batch of those cautions, that she found the Wogglebeast had emptied her sewing-basket, and collected treasures of its own there: an empty spool, a bit of tinfoil, an eraser worked loose from the end of a pencil—nothing of course that anybody else was going to want or that Danny would miss. Molly didn't mind at all, especially when she noticed how it was watching her with the jokesharing gleam in —well, not its eyes exactly . . .

Danny was not told of the miracle until they were in bed, their faces in darkness. By then Molly was enough used to the idea so that she could quiet his anxiety a little and help him into a precarious but genuine happiness. It occurred to her as she was drifting into sleep, himself holding her as if she were spun glass, that it was going to be simpler now to arrange abour Danny's relations with the Wogglebeast. You have to humor a pregnant woman and allow her all sorts of quirks.

She told Dorothy Perlman the next day—on the phone, and casually she thought, but Mrs. Perlman came over immediately under full sail, pouring forth advice, suggestions, consolation, sustaining anecdotes, offering a massive shoulder to cry on and restless until it was used. Her first had scared Nathan all to pieces, she said, and even scared her a little, but when the time came it simply popped. Like *that*.

Molly McManus liked people. She was on the silly edge of telling Dorothy about the Wogglebeast, but some hint of a gray disturbance over there in the bureau drawer behind Dorothy's back, like the lifting of a worried—oh, not head exactly—made Molly feel that it might not be just the best idea.

It's not that there's anything *wrong* with a Wogglebeast. Just all that pesky explaining you'd have to do.

It happened that Danny was so obsessed with the miracle he had no mind for anything else. Molly fell into the habit of leaving the bottom drawer more widely open. The Wogglebeast clearly enjoyed that, but took no unreasonable ad-

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vantages of it. It did sometimes slip out of its basket when Danny was home, but carefully, and only if he happened to be in another room—well, once, one Sunday afternoon when Molly supposed Danny was taking a nap, she did hear the abrupt thump of his feet on the bedroom floor, and the beginning of an exclamation: "B' Je—" but nothing else happened. Maybe she imagined it.

One evening in August, shortly before their two weeks' vacation in Atlantic City, Danny talked with her more searchingly than he usually did. He wanted a reassurance that she was happy—not in the future with the baby and all, but in the here and now. "Why, Danny, I am, you know I am. I bet you went to bother the doctor again today."

"Oh, for the sake of argument I did. Everything is fine, he says, and what else would he say if you went to him running a mortal fever with two busted legs?"

Molly herself knew that nothing could possibly go wrong—miracles don't. But it takes more than aspirin to get a husband through these things; from the bureau drawer came now and then a tiny sigh.

That night she woke in the small hours and noticed the Wogglebeast hesitant and forlorn on the bedroom rug. Danny was sound asleep. She held away a corner of the bed-covers so it could climb up if it wanted to, and as she went back to sleep she felt against her shoulder the dry wiggle of—not its legs, exactly.

And the next day Danny came home announcing that, as he put it himself, he was letting them kick him upstairs from foreman to supervisor. Not office work exactly, he explained to Molly's excited questions, but something like it. "And so glory be to God you won't be messing around so much with the nasty stuff all day long?"

"It'll be like that," he said rather carefully. "I told them, I said, I've been foreman a long time, and now I must be thinking about the heir of The McManus and so forth."

The Wogglebeast was well-behaved at Atlantic City. Molly had been uneasy about its smothery journey in a suitcase, but it took no harm. She had a little trouble in her mind about the hotel chambermaid, but solved it by admiring a very large handbag in a shop window, which Danny immediately bought for her; it had a compartment where the Wogglebeast was perfectly happy, and even made a sort of game out of covering itself with facial tissues and what not.

They stayed apart from the crowds, and watched the sea and the long changes of the sky. On other vacations they had often gone about with friends, in a round of parties and picnics and nonsense. She had no wish for that

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this time, and Danny found it natural.

One day on the beach she said, hardly heeding the way her talk was going: "I wish you'd known my grandmother, Danny. She died when I was twelve, you know, and it was like the milkweed down drying up to a little whiteness and blowing away. O the stories she used to tell, and me with my mouth open and a wind going through my wits if I had any! She told once how they came and carried her away, the Little People she meant, and you had to believe her, the way she had of telling it, how she fell asleep in a meadow on Midsummer's Night, and she eleven years old, and they came for her, and didn't they set her to ride on a milk-white pony and it went straight underground with her into their dwelling? The hollow at the foot of an oak it was, and there they fed her cakes and honey and made things out of sticks and leaves that would walk and speak and play the violin. And then I'd ask her, 'Grandmother, didn't you bring some of them home, the stick things that walked and made music?' She'd always say, 'I did and all, Molly, but you'll remember this was seventy-eighty-ninety years ago, they'd be dust now, and anyhow they couldn't come away with me from the old country . . .'"

Snow was falling again when Molly's pains began, rather too soon. In between them, when Danny was telephoning to the hospital, Molly petted the Wogglebeast and tried to explain how it must be quiet a few days in its basket and not worry about anything, anything at all. It was always difficult to decide just how much it understood; but it did seem to be smiling, not with its mouth exactly . . .

When Molly came out of the anesthetic, one of the nurses was saying like a litany: "You're doing just fine, Mrs. McManus, just fine." Well, sure, she knew she was. Daniel was the beginning of a a world. She looked with tolerant affection on the busy doctor and nurses, a little sorry for them because they had nothing as wonderful as she did.

So far as the doctor and nurses were aware, the baby was ten yards away in another room, where another doctor had given up trying to make it live. So far as they could see, there was no reason why Mrs. McManus should hold her left arm curved like that. No reason why, torn and fading as she was, she should look so extravagantly happy. When the internal hemorrhage passed the point of no return they were still trying.

Danny happened on the sewing-basket a while after he came home, and sagged on the bed poking vaguely at it, wondering with some part of his numb mind what had happened to the old dry chicken-bone she had fancied so much.

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It didn't matter. There was nothing in the basket now but some kind of gray powder, and bits of miscellaneous trash—a spool, a scrap of tinfoil, never mind all that. There had always been something about Molly to make you think of a little girl playing with dolls. The strangest part of it was that you went on living. He sat drooping, considering this, the sewing-basket forgotten in his hands, watching the snow gently fall.

LOVE LETTER FROM MARS

Dear cell, the Martian winter ends.
The tubes run green again, and green
the hydroponic hills are seen
without their glass. Our ship ascends
through a new vapor. And the Frogs
grow restless in their locks. Unrest
is on us all. This gravity
works through me. No psychometry
keeps its adjustment. Everywhere
the Frogs are hating us, hating us.
(Can we shut out what we shut in?)
Sometimes I tense myself to tear
my filter off, gulp, and be damned.
"A lot of extra-sensory fuss,"
I tell myself, but can't command
the balance of my mood. My dear,
something is happening to Spring:
we've come too far from everything.

—JOHN CIARDI

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BOOKS

TRADER TO THE STARS, Poul Anderson, Doubleday, $3.50

Poul Anderson may someday be a generic term. A term to cover the kind of book he writes with greater frequency and efficiency than most. A Poul Anderson is certain to contain the crackle of blasters and/or the clank of swords, the howling of natives and the batting of eyelashes. All described in a prose that is both slick and pulp.

This one is made up of three novelets (*Hiding Place, Territory* and *The Master Key* from Analog) that deal with the adventures of Nicholas van Rijn, the trader of the title, who roves the universe making deals for his Solar Spice & Liquors Company. Like many series characters van Rijn must re-establish himself in each episode and this gives a compulsive quality to his mannerisms and gestures. He is continually hoisting tankards and waggling his jowls. He is also afflicted with a bad case of Babu English, a complaint frequently suffered by Poul Anderson's more aggressively whimsical characters.

FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD, Robert A. Heinlein, Putnam, $4.95

This is a dismal book, dealing with a family group propelled into the future by nuclear disaster, loaded down with preachments. The story itself is slow and fat and the philosophy resembles the thinking of a retired Southern California maiden lady.

Hugh Farnham, a rigid middle-aged man, along with his wife and his son and his daughter and his son's girlfriend and his servant and the family cat, are seated one night in the bomb shelter. Suddenly the fondest hopes of Farnham are fulfilled and the bombs do indeed come. By one of those lucky flukes in time the Farnham family bomb shelter is projected into the future. Many pages later it turns out the futue is Negro dominated. Before this point is reached Farnham has threatened to kill his son several times (in the interest of running a tight bomb shelter), abandoned his wife, impregnated his son's girl friend and botched the delivery of his daughter's child.

Despite interludes of this sort *Farnham's Freehold* is an almost

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motionless book. The group is usually to be found sitting and talking. They talk great long thick passages of talk. In many instances the only action there is occurs when a character moves from a sitting to a standing position during a conversation. When the Farnham family circle isn't talking they are playing bridge. They play bridge in the present, they play bridge in their bomb shelter, they play bridge 2000 years in the future.

With the important exceptions of an awareness of nuclear weapons and the cold-war, these stiff stock people could almost be from the 1930s, from the decade of Saturday Evening Post fiction and Andy Hardy movies. Almost, except for the fact that they are really a morbid caricature of the unreal families of past popular fiction. I do not believe Heinlein means them for caricatures.

There is, too, a great deal of unsettling description of the physical, be it love, birth or death. It is written with a mixture of attraction, revulsion and sadism. The same mixture in main stream fiction would mean a best seller.

The world that Heinlein ends up in here can never exist and the contemporary America he starts out from doesn't exist either. Extrapolation from reality to fantasy led to the good things Heinlein did twenty years ago. Extrapolation from fantasy to fantasy can only produce the kind of pathetic nightmare it has here.

BEST GHOST STORIES OF J. S. LEFANU, Edited by E. F. Bleiler, Dover, $2.00

Every couple of decades some one raises the ghost of J. Sheridan LeFanu. In 1945 it was August Derleth and now it's E. F. Bleiler. This newest collection offers nearly five hundred pages of LeFanu's quiet, complex ghost stories and novelets. LeFanu, who flourished in Dublin in the middle of the last century, has a fine style and an intelligent approach to ghosts and vampires. To really enjoy his work, though, requires a patience and an undistracted leisure that we don't share with the Victorians.

THE POISON BELT, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Macmillan, $4.50

In addition to an introduction by John Dickson Carr, an epilogue by Harlow Shapley and numerous illustrations by William Pène du Bois, *The Poison Belt* offers a very thin story by Arthur Conan Doyle. This over-packaged adventure is concerned with poisonous ether that seems intent on wiping out humanity. Here again is the team from *The Lost World*, newspaperman Edward Malone as narrator and high-foreheaded, thickly bearded Professor Challenger as protagonist.

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Professor Challenger's approach to the poison belt problem lacks the chutzpah he displayed in his encounters with the dinosaurs. All he does is invite a group of friends up to see out the world with him. Except that the guests are requested to bring tanks of oxygen, everything's as casual as a weekend party at an English country house. The quiet stolid era Doyle wrote in is long gone and even in England it would probably be impossible to gather five such dull people together today.

The biggest thing wrong with this book is that Challenger is not Sherlock Holmes and Malone is not Dr. Watson. There is nothing afoot here.

Illustration by William Pène du Bois, from THE POISON BELT.

TARZAN AND THE MADMAN, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Canaveral, $3.50

Like acne and orthodontists Edgar Rice Burroughs is one of the staples of adolescence. His style is a bad involution of Kipling, Rider Haggard, Victorian romances and pulp detective stories. His plots are too rambling even to be called picaresque. When Burroughs feels things dragging verbally he will start calling grass sward and muscles thews. When the plot bogs he'll either undress the heroine or stumble onto a lost city. Yet his Tarzan, clad only in a loin cloth, has obsessed growing boys for a full half century.

Tarzan seems to stand at the threshold of growing up. He appeals to the desire to run around in a leopard skin diaper, away and safe from the realities of clothes and grownups. And at the same time he acts out an inexperienced boy's idea of what relations with girls and adults will be like. Burroughs' basic story is, too, a sort of cockeyed switch on the Oedipus myth. Burroughs had the advantage, one shared with the creators of many of the most compelling myths for juveniles, of being able to identify with and appeal to his half grown readers.

The plot of this newly discovered Tarzan book is the same as always. Kidnapped heroines, lost civilizations, villains who are all around rotters. There is the added

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pleasure of a character who thinks he is Tarzan.

GHOST AND HORROR STORIES OF AMBROSE BIERCE, Selected and Edited by E. F. Bleiler, Dover, $1.00

It's difficult to be completely in favor of Ambrose Bierce. Even if you disregard the ingeniously surly things he did when he wasn't writing there are still his stories and articles to be ambivalent about. Bleiler has been probably too fair in showing both the good and the bad sides of Bierce's work. Effective stories like *The Damned Thing* and *The Haunted Valley* are balanced by terrible stiffs like *The Eyes Of The Panther* and *A Jug Of Sirup.*

But there is certainly a dollar's worth of good stories here. And the introduction is a fine summing up of Bierce's outrages in and out of print. Bierce's own piece on his dreams gives an insight into one of the things that pushed him toward the kind of stories he so often wrote.

MEET MY MAKER THE MAD MOLECULE, J. P. Donleavy, Atlantic-Little, Brown, $4.75

I'm grateful to the Atlantic-Little, Brown people of Boston for sending this book along. You'll have to decide for yourself whether any of the twenty seven stories in this collection by the author of *The Ginger Man* are fantasy. They are all wild, funny, sad, effective and individual.

It takes a while to realize that the language Burroughs and Heinlein use is the same one J .P. Donleavy works with. He does so much more with it. And Donleavy is on the side of life. This is a book that should be read.

—RON GOULART

ABOUT THE COVER

THIS MONTH'S COVER by Mel Hunter depicts three ships descending to the surface of Triton, inner satellite of Neptune. This painting is one of a group of murals done by Mel Hunter for the restaurant at the Transportation and Travel Pavilion of the World's Fair. Full color proofs of this cover without overprinting are available at 75¢ each. Send remittance to Mercury, Box 271, Rockville Centre, N. Y.

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In 1742 a man named Samuel King came to the U. S. from Europe and settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Either Mr. King or his wife possessed a recessive gene—which geneticists now say was responsible for 49 cases of a rare type of dwarfism among the Lancaster Amish, equivalent to the total number of such cases elsewhere in all recorded medical history! The inbreeding of the Lancaster group (there has been no "new blood" since pre-revolutionary days) was blamed for the dwarfism deformity. Avram Davidson's story does not deal with the Pennsylvania Amish. But it does deal with genetic and cultural isolation—and the resulting deformity is infinitely more tragic than dwarfism. This story will probably startle you.

THE HOUSE THE BLAKENEYS BUILT

by Avram Davidson

"FOUR PEOPLE COMING DOWN the Forest Road, a hey," Old Big Mary said.

Young Red Tom understood her at once. "Not ours."

Things grew very quiet in the long kitchenroom. Old Whitey Bill shifted in his chairseat. "Those have's to be Runaway Little Bob's and that Thin Jinnie's," he said. "Help me up, some."

"No," Old Big Mary said. "They're not."

"Has to be." Old Whitey Bill shuffled up, leaning on his canestick. "Has to be. Whose elses could they be. Always said, me, she ran after him."

Young Whitey Bill put another chunk of burnwood on the burning. "Rowwer, rowwer," he muttered. Then everyone was talking at once, crowding up to the windowlooks. Then everybody stopped the talking. The big foodpots bubbled. Young Big Mary mumbletalked excitedly. Then her words came out clearsound.

"Look to here—look to here—I say, me, they aren't Blakeneys."

Old Little Mary, coming down from the spindleroom, called out, "People! People! Three and four of them down the Forest Road and I don't know them and, oh, they funnywalk!"

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"Four strange people!"

"Not Blakeneys!"

"Stop sillytalking! Has to be! Who elses?"

"But not Blakeneys!"

"Not from The House, look to, look to! People—not from The House!"

"Runaway Bob and that Thin Jinnie?"

"No, can't be. No old ones."

"Children? Childrenchildren?"

All who hadn't been lookseeing before came now, all who were at The House, that is—running from the cowroom and the horseroom and dairyroom, ironroom, schoolroom, even from the sickroom.

"Four people! Not Blakeneys, some say!"

"Blakeneys or not Blakeneys, not from The House!"

Robert Hayakawa and his wife Shulamith came out of the forest, Ezra and Mikicho with them. "Well, as I said," Robert observed, in his slow careful way, "a road may end nowhere, going in one direction, but it's not likely it will end nowhere, going in the other."

Shulamith sighed. She was heavy with child. "Tilled fields. I'm glad of that. There was no sign of them anywhere else on the planet. This must be a new settlement. But we've been all over that—" She stopped abruptly, so did they all.

Ezra pointed. "A house—"

"It's more like a, well, what would you say?" Mikicho moved her mouth, groping for a word. "A . . . a *castle*? Robert?"

Very softly, Robert said, "It's not new, whatever it is. It is very much not new, don't you see, Shulamith. *What*—?"

She had given a little cry of alarm, or perhaps just surprise. All four turned to see what had surprised her. A man was running over the field towards them. He stopped, stumbling, as they all turned to him. Then he started again, a curious shambling walk. They could see his mouth moving after a while. He pointed to the four, waved his hand, waggled his head.

"Hey," they could hear him saying. "A hey, a hey. Hey. Look to. Mum. Mum mum mum. Oh, hey . . ."

He had a florid face, a round face that bulged over the eyes, and they were prominent and blue eyes. His nose was an eagle's nose, sharp and hooked, and his mouth was loose and trembling. "Oh, hey, you must be, mum, his name, what? And she run off to follow him? Longlong. Jinnie! Thin Jinnie! Childrenchildren, a hey?" Behind him in the field two animals paused before a plow, switching their tails.

"Michiko, look," said Ezra. "Those must be cows."

The man had stopped about ten feet away. He was dressed in

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loose, coarse cloth. Again he waggled his head. "Cows, no. Oh, no, mum mum, freemartins, elses. Not cows." Something occurred to him, almost staggering in its astonishment. "A hey, you won't know me! Won't know me!" He laughed. "Oh. What a thing. Strange Blakeneys. Old Red Tom, I say, me."

Gravely, they introduced themselves. He frowned, his slack mouth moving. "Don't know them name," he said, after a moment. "No, a mum. Make them up, like children, in the woods. Longlong. Oh, I, now! Runaway Little Bob. Yes, that name! Your fatherfather. Dead, a hey?"

Very politely, very wearily, feeling—now that he had stopped—the fatigue of the long, long walk, Robert Hayakawa said, "I'm afraid I don't know him. We are not, I think, who you seem to think we are . . . might we go on to the house, do you know?" His wife murmured her agreement, and leaned against him.

Old Red Tom, who had been gaping, seemed suddenly to catch at a word. "The House! A hey, yes. Go on to The House. Good now. Mum."

They started off, more slowly than before, and Old Red Tom, having unhitched his freemartins, followed behind, from time to time calling something unintelligible. "A funny fellow," said Ezra. "He talks so *oddly,*" Mikicho said. And Shulamith said that all she wanted was to sit down. Then—.

"Oh, look," she said. "*Look!*"

"They have all come to greet us," her husband observed.

And so they had.

Nothing like this event had ever occurred in the history of the Blakeneys. But they were not found wanting. They brought the strangers into The House, gave them the softest chairseats, nearest to the burning; gave them cookingmilk and cheesemeats and tatoplants. Fatigue descended on the newcomers in a rush; they ate and drank somewhat, then they sank back, silent.

But the people of the house were not silent, far from it. Most of them who had been away had now come back, they milled around, some gulping eats, others craning and staring, most talking and talking and talking—few of them mumbletalking, now that the initial excitement had ebbed a bit. To the newcomers, eyes now opening with effort, now closing, despite, the people of the house seemed like figures from one of those halls of mirrors they had read about in social histories: the same faces, clothes . . . but, ah, indeed, not the same dimensions. Everywhere—florid complexions, bulging blue eyes, protruding bones at the forehead, hooked thin noses, flabby mouths.

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Blakeneys.

Thin Blakeneys, big Blakeneys, little Blakeneys, old ones, young ones, male and female. There seemed to be one standard model from which the others had been stretched or compressed, but it was difficult to conjecture what this exact standard was.

"Starside, then," Young Big Mary said—and said again and again, clearsound. "No elses live to Blakeneyworld. Starside, Starside, a hey, Starside. Same as Captains."

Young Whitey Bill pointed with a stick of burnwood at Shulamith. "Baby grows," he said. "Rower, rower. Baby soon."

With a great effort, Robert roused himself. "Yes. She's going to have a baby very soon. We will be glad of your help."

Old Whitey Bill came for another look to, hobbling on his canestick. "We descend," he said, putting his face very close to Robert's, "we descend from the Captains. Hasn't heard of them, you? Elses not heard? Funny. Funny-funny. We descend, look to. From the Captains. Captain Tom Blakeney. And his wives. Captain Bill Blakeney. And his wives. Brothers, they. Jinnie, Mary, Captain Tom's wives. Other Mary, Captain Bob's wife. Had another wife, but we don't remember it, us, her name. They lived, look to, Starside. You, too? Mum, you? A hey, Starside?"

Robert nodded. "When?" he asked. "When did they come from Starside? The brothers."

Night had fallen, but no lights were lit. Only the dancing flames, steadily fed, of the burning, with chunks and chunks of fat and greasy burnwood, flickered and illuminated the great room. "Ah, when," said Old Red Tom, thrusting up to the chairseat. "When we children, old Blakeneys say, a hey, five hundredyear. Long-long."

Old Little Mary said, suddenly, "They funnywalk. They funnytalk. But, oh, they funnylook, too!"

"A baby. A baby. Grows a baby, soon."

And two or three little baby Blakeneys, like shrunken versions of their elders, gobbled and giggled and asked to see the Starside baby. The big ones laughed, told them, soon.

"Five hundred . . ." Hayakawa drowsed. He snapped awake. "The four of us," he said, "were heading in our boat for the Moons of Lor. Have you—no, I see, you never have. It's a short trip, really. But something happened to us, I don't know . . . how to explain it . . . we ran into something . . . something that wasn't there. A warp? A hole? That's silly, I know, but—it was as though we felt the boat *drop*, somehow. And then, after that, our instruments didn't work and we saw we had no celes-

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tial references . . . not a star we knew. What's that phrase, 'A new Heaven and a new Earth?' We were just able to reach her. Blakeneyworld, as you call it."

Sparks snapped and flew. Someone said, "Sleepytime." And then all the Blakeneys went away and then Hayakawa slept.

It was washtime when the four woke up, and all the Blakeneys around The House, big and little, were off scrubbing themselves and their clothes. "I guess that food on the table is for us," Ezra said. "I will assume it is for us. Say grace, Robert. I'm hungry."

Afterwards they got up and looked around. The room was big and the far end so dark, even with sunshine pouring in through the open shutters, that they could hardly make out the painting on the wall. The paint was peeling, anyway, and a crack like a flash of lightning ran through it; plaster or something of the sort had been slapped onto it, but this had mostly fallen out, its only lasting effect being to deface the painting further.

"Do you suppose that the two big figures could be the Captains?" Mikicho asked, for Robert had told them what Old Whitey Bill had said.

"I would guess so. They look grim and purposeful . . . When was the persecution of the polygamists, anybody know?"

Current social histories had little to say about that period, but the four finally agreed it had been during the Refinishing Era, and that this had been about six hundred years ago. "Could this house be that old?" Shulamith asked. "Parts of it, I suppose, could be. I'll tell you what I think, *I* think that those two Captains set out like ancient patriarchs with their wives and their families and their flocks and so on, heading for somewhere where they wouldn't be persecuted. And then they hit —well, whatever it was that *we* hit. And wound up here. Like us."

Mikicho said, in a small, small voice, "And perhaps it will be another six hundred years before anyone else comes here. Oh, we're here for good and forever. That's sure."

They walked on, silent and unsure, through endless corridors and endless rooms. Some were clean enough, others were clogged with dust and rubbish, some had fallen into ruin, some were being used for barns and stables, and in one was a warm forge.

"Well," Robert said at last, "we must make the best of it. We cannot change the configurations of the universe."

Following the sounds they presently heard brought them to the washroom, slippery, warm, steamy, noisy. Once again they were surrounded by the antic Blakeney face and form in its

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many permutations. "Washtime, washtime!" their hosts shouted, showing them where to put their clothes, fingering the garments curiously, helping them to soap, explaining which of the pools were fed by hot springs, which by warm and cold, giving them towels, assisting Shulamith carefully.

"Your world house, you, a hey," began a be-soaped Blakeney to Ezra; "bigger than this? No."

Ezra agreed, "No."

"Your—Blakeneys? No. Mum, mum. Hey. Family? Smaller, a hey?"

"Oh, much smaller."

The Blakeney nodded. Then he offered to scrub Ezra's back if Ezra would scrub his.

The hours passed, and the days. There seemed no government, no rules, only ways and habits and practices. Those who felt so inclined, worked. Those who didn't . . . didn't. No one suggested the newcomers do anything, no one prevented from doing anything. It was perhaps a week later that Robert and Ezra invited themselves on a trip along the shore of the bay. Two healthy horses pulled a rickety wagon.

The driver's name was Young Little Bob. "Gots to fix a floor-walk," he said. "In the, a hey, in the sickroom. Needs boards. Lots at the riverwater."

The sun was warm. The House now and again vanished behind trees or hills, now and again, as the road curved with the bay, came into view, looming over everything.

"We've got to find something for ourselves to *do*," Ezra said. "These people may be all one big happy family, they better be, the only family on the whole planet all this time. But if I spend any much more time with them I think I'll become as dippy as they are."

Robert said, deprecatingly, that the Blakeneys weren't *very* dippy. "Besides," he pointed out, "sooner or later our children are going to have to intermarry with them, and—"

"Our children can intermarry with each other—"

"Our grandchildren, then. I'm afraid we haven't the ancient skills necessary to be pioneers, otherwise we might go . . . just anywhere. There is, after all, lots of room. But in a few hundred years, perhaps less, our descendents would be just as inbred and, well, odd. This way, at least, there's a chance. Hybrid vigor, and all that."

They forded the river at a point just directly opposite The House. A thin plume of smoke rose from one of its great, gaunt chimneys. The wagon turned up an overgrown path which followed up the river. "Lots of boards," said Young Little Bob. "Mum mum mum."

There were lots of boards, just

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as he said, weathered a silver grey. They were piled under the roof of a great open shed. At the edge of it a huge wheel turned and turned in the water. It, like the roof, was made of some dull and unrusted metal. But only the wheel turned. The other machinery was dusty.

"Millstones," Ezra said. "And saws. Lathes. And . . . all sorts of things. Why do they—Bob? Young Little Bob, I mean—why do you grind your grain by hand?"

The driver shrugged. "Have's to make flour, a hey. Bread."

Obviously, none of the machinery was in running order. It was soon obvious that no living Blakeney knew how to mend this, although (said Young Little Bob) there were those who could remember when things were otherwise: Old Big Mary, Old Little Mary, Old Whitey Bill—

Hayakawa, with a polite gesture, turned away from the recitation. "Ezra . . . I think we might be able to fix all this. Get it in running order. *That* would be something to do, wouldn't it? Something well worth doing. It would make a big difference."

Ezra said that it would make all the difference.

Shulamith's child, a girl, was born on the edge of a summer evening when the sun streaked the sky with rose, crimson, magenta, lime, and purple. "We'll name her *Hope*," she said.

"Tongs to make tongs," Mikicho called the work of repair. She saw the restoration of the water-power as the beginning of a process which must eventually result in their being spaceborne again. Robert and Ezra did not encourage her in this. It was a long labor of work. They pored and sifted through The House from its crumbling top to its vast, vast colonnaded cellar, finding much that was of use to them, much which—though of no use—was interesting and intriguing—and much which was not only long past use but whose very usage could now be no more than a matter of conjecture. They found tools, metal which could be forged into tools, they found a whole library of books and they found the Blakeney-made press on which the books had been printed; the most recent was a treatise on the diseases of cattle, its date little more than a hundred years earlier. Decay had come quickly.

None of the Blakeneys were of much use in the matter of repairs. They were willing enough to lift and move—until the novelty wore off; then they were only in the way. The nearest to an exception was Big Fat Red Bob, the blacksmith; and, as his usual work was limited to sharpening plowshares, even he was not of much use. Robert and Ezra worked from sunrise to late afternoon. They would have worked longer, but as soon as the first chill hit the air, whatever

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Blakeneys were on hand began to get restless.

"Have's to get back, now, a hey. Have's to start back."

"Why?" Ezra had asked, at first. "There are no harmful animals on Blakeneyworld, are there?"

It was nothing that any of them could put into words, either clear-sound or mumbletalk. They had no tradition of things that go bump in the night, but nothing could persuade them to spend a minute of the night outside the thick walls of The House. Robert and Ezra found it easier to yield, return with them. There were so many false starts, the machinery beginning to function and then breaking down, that no celebration took place to mark any particular day as the successful one. The nearest thing to it was the batch of cakes that Old Big Mary baked from the first millground flour.

"Like longlong times," she said, contentedly, licking crumbs from her toothless chops. She looked at the newcomers, made a face for their baby. A thought occurred to her, and, after a moment or two, she expressed it. "Not ours," she said. "Not ours, you. Elses. But I rather have's you here than that Runaway Little Bob back, or that Thin Jinnie . . . Yes, I rathers."

There was only one servicable axe, so no timber was cut. But Ezra found a cove where driftwood, limbs and entire trees, was continually piling up; and the sawmill didn't lack for wood to feed it. "Makes a lot of boards, a hey," Young Little Bob said one day.

"We're building a house," Robert explained.

The wagoner looked across the bay at the mighty towers and turrets, the great gables and long walls. From the distance no breach was noticeable, although two of the chimneys could be seen to slant slightly. "Lots to build," he said. "A hey, whole roof on north end wing, mum mum, bad, it's bad, hey."

"No, we're building our own house."

He looked at them, surprised. "Wants to build another room? Easier, I say, me, clean up a no-one's room. Oh, a hey, lots of them!"

Robert let the matter drop, then, but it could not be dropped forever, so one night after eats he began to explain. "We are very grateful for your help to us," he said, "strangers as we are to you and to your ways. Perhaps it is because we *are* strange that we feel we want to have our own house to live in."

The Blakeneys were, for Blakeneys, quiet. They were also uncomprehending.

"It's the way we've been used to living. On many of the other worlds people do live, many families—and the families are all smaller than this, than yours, than the Blakeneys, I mean—many in one big house. But not on the

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world we lived in. There, every family has its own house, you see. We've been used to that. Now, at first, all five of us will live in the new house we're going to build near the mill. But as soon as we can we'll build a second new one. Then each family will have its own . . ."

He stopped, look helplessly at his wife and friends. He began again, in the face of blank non-understanding, "We hope you'll help us. We'll trade our services for your supplies. You give us food and cloth, we'll grind your flour and saw your wood. We can help you fix your furniture, your looms, your broken floors and walls and roofs. And eventually—"

But he never got to explain about eventually. It was more than he could do to explain about the new house. No Blakeneys came to the house-raising. Robert and Ezra fixed up a capstan and hoist, block-and-tackle, managed—with the help of the two women—to get their small house built. But nobody of the Blakeneys ever came any more with grain to be ground, and when Robert and Ezra went to see them they saw that the newly-sawn planks and the lathe-turned wood still lay where it had been left.

"The food we took with us is gone," Robert said. "We have to have more. I'm sorry you feel this way. Please understand, it is not that we don't like you. It's just that we have to live our own way. In our own houses."

The silence was broken by a baby Blakeney. "What's 'houses'?," he asked.

He was shushed. "No such word, hey," he was told, too.

Robert went on, "We're going to ask you to lend us things. We want enough grain and tatoplants and such to last till we can get our own crops in, and enough milk-cattle and draft-animals until we can breed some of our own. Will you do that for us?"

Except for Young Whitey Bill, crouched by the burning, who mumbletalked with "Rower, rower, rower," they still kept silence. Popping blue eyes stared, faces were perhaps more florid than usual, large, slack mouths trembled beneath long hook-noses.

"We're wasting time," Ezra said.

Robert sighed. "Well, we have no other choice, friends . . . Blakeneys . . . We're going to have to take what we need, then. But we'll pay you back, as soon as we can, two for one. And anytime you want our help or service, you can have it. We'll be friends again. We *must* be friends. There are so many, many ways we can help one another to live better—and we are all there are, really, of humanity, on all this planet. We—"

Ezra nudged him, half-pulled him away. They took a wagon and a team of horses, a dray and a yoke of freemartins, loaded up with food. They took cows and ewes, a yearling bull and a shearling ram,

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a few bolts of cloth, and seed. No one prevented them, or tried to interfere, as they drove away. Robert turned and looked behind at the silent people. But then, head sunk, he watched only the bay road ahead of him, looking aside neither to the water or the woods.

"It's good that they can see us here," he said, later on that day. "It's bound to make them think, and, sooner or later, they'll come around."

They came sooner than he thought.

"I'm so glad to see you, friends!" Robert came running out to greet them. They seized and bound him with unaccustomed hands. Then, paying no attention to his anguished cries of "Why? Why?" they rushed into the new house and dragged out Shulamith and Mikicho and the baby. They drove the animals from their stalls, but took nothing else. The stove was now the major object of interest. First they knocked it over, then they scattered the burning coals all about, then they lit brands of burnwood and scrambled around with them. In a short while the building was all afire.

The Blakeneys seemed possessed. Faces red, eyes almost popping from their heads, they mumble-shouted and raved. When Ezra, who had been working in the shed came running, fighting, they bore him to the ground and beat him with pieces of wood. He did not get up when they were through; it seemed apparent that he never would. Mikicho began a long and endless scream.

Robert stopped struggling for a moment. Caught off-guard, his captors loosened their hold—he broke away from their hands and his bonds, and, crying, "The tools! The tools!", dashed into the burning fire. The blazing roof fell in upon him with a great crash. No sound came from him, nor from Shulamith, who fainted. The baby began a thin, reedy wail.

Working as quickly as they could, in their frenzy, the Blakeneys added to the lumber and waste and scraps around the machinery in the shed, soon had it all ablaze.

The fire could be seen all the way back.

"Wasn't right, wasn't right," Young Red Bob said, over and over again.

"A bad thing," Old Little Mary agreed.

Young Big Mary carried the baby. Shulamith and Mikicho were led, dragging, along. "Little baby, a hey, a hey," she crooned.

Old Whitey Bill was dubious. "Be bad blood," he said. "The elses women grow more babies. A mum mum," he mused. "Teach them better. Not to funnywalk, such." He nodded and mumbled, peered out of the windowlook, his loose mouth widening with satisfaction. "Wasn't right," he said. "Wasn't

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right. Another house. Can't be another *house,* a second, a third. Hey, a hey! Never was elses but The House. Never be again. No."

He looked around, his gaze encompassing the cracked walls, sinking floors, sagging roof. A faint smell of smoke was in the air. "The House," he said, contentedly. "The House."

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It may be true that those who study the works of William Shakespeare for the purpose of casting some light upon the enigma of his personality are wasting their time. "A man's life of any worth," wrote Keats, "is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life." So that an answer to that mystery is no more likely to be found in an analysis of his works than in, say, a performance of Hamlet *by a theatrical company in a small-town theater with a "supernatural smell." We think that all of you will be utterly charmed and pleased by this story of Fritz Leiber's.*

FOUR GHOSTS IN HAMLET

by Fritz Leiber

ACTORS ARE A SUPERSTITIOUS lot, probably because chance plays a big part in the success of a production of a company or merely an actor—and because we're still a little closer than other people to the gypsies in the way we live and think. For instance, it's bad luck to have peacock feathers on stage or say the last line of a play at rehearsals or whistle in the dressing room (the one nearest the door gets fired) or sing God Save the Sovereign on a railway train. (A Canadian company got wrecked that way.)

Shakespearean actors are no exceptions. They simply travel a few extra superstitions, such as the one which forbids reciting the lines of the Three Witches, or anything from *Macbeth*, for that matter, except at performances, rehearsals, and on other legitimate occasions. This might be a good rule for outsiders too—then there wouldn't be the endless flood of books with titles taken from the text of *Macbeth*—you know, *Brief Candle, Tomorrow and Tomorrow, The Sound and the Fury, A Poor Player, All Our Yesterdays,* and those are all just from one brief soliloquy.

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And our company, the Governor's company, has a rule against the Ghost in *Hamlet* dropping his greenish cheesecloth veil over his helmet-framed face until the very moment he makes each of his entrances. Hamlet's dead father mustn't stand veiled in the darkness of the wings.

This last superstition commemorates something which happened not too long ago, an actual ghost story. Sometimes I think it's the greatest ghost story in the world—though certainly not from my way of telling it, which is gossipy and poor, but from the wonder blazing at its core.

It's not only a true tale of the supernatural, but also very much a story about people, for after all—and before everything else—ghosts are people.

The ghostly part of the story first showed itself in the tritest way imaginable: three of our actresses (meaning practically all the ladies in a Shakespearean company) took to having sessions with a Ouija board in the hour before curtain time and sometimes even during a performance when they had long offstage waits, and they became so wrapped up in it and conceited about it and they squeaked so excitedly at the revelations which the planchette spelled out—and three or four times almost missed entrances because of it—that if the Governor weren't such a tolerant commander-in-chief, he would have forbidden them to bring the board to the theater. I'm sure he was tempted to and might have, except that Props pointed out to him that our three ladies probably wouldn't enjoy Ouija sessions one bit in the privacy of a hotel room, that much of the fun in operating a Ouija board is in having a half exasperated, half intrigued floating audience, and that when all's done the basic business of all ladies is glamour, whether of personal charm or of actual witchcraft, since the word means both.

Props—that is, our property man, Billy Simpson—was fascinated by their obsession, as he is by any new thing that comes along, and might very well have broken our Shakespearean taboo by quoting the Three Witches about them, except that Props has no flair for Shakespearean speech at all, no dramatic ability whatsoever, in fact he's the one person in our company who never acts even a bit part or carries a mute spear on stage, though he has other talents which make up for this deficiency—he can throw together a papier mache bust of Pompey in two hours, or turn out a wooden prop dagger all silvery-bladed and hilt-gilded, or fix a zipper, and that's not all.

As for myself, I was very irked at the ridiculous alphabet board, since it seemed to occupy most of Monica Singleton's spare time and satisfy all her hunger for thrills.

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I'd been trying to promote a romance with her—a long touring season becomes deadly and cold without some sort of heart-tickle—and for a while I'd made progress. But after Ouija came along, I became a ridiculous Guildenstern mooning after an unattainable unseeing Ophelia—which were the parts I and she actually played in *Hamlet*.

I cursed the idiot board with its childish corner-pictures of grinning suns and smirking moons and windblown spirits, and I further alienated Monica by asking her why wasn't it called a Nenein or No-No board (Ninny board!) instead of a Yes-Yes board? Was that, I inquired, because all spiritualists are forever accentuating the positive and behaving like a pack of fawning yes-men?—yes, we're here; yes, we're your uncle Harry; yes, we're happy on this plane; yes, we have a doctor among us who'll diagnose that pain in your chest; and so on.

Monica wouldn't speak to me for a week after that.

I would have been even more depressed except that Props pointed out to me that no flesh-and-blood man can compete with ghosts in a girl's affections, since ghosts being imaginary have all the charms and perfections a girl can dream of, but that all girls eventually tire of ghosts, or if their minds don't, their bodies do. This eventually did happen, thank goodness, in the case of myself and Monica, though not until we'd had a grisly, mind-wrenching experience—a night of terrors before the nights of love.

So Ouija flourished and the Governor and the rest of us put up with it one way or another, until there came that three-night-stand in Wolverton, when its dismal uncanny old theater tempted our three Ouija-women to ask the board who was the ghost haunting the spooky place and the swooping planchette spelled out the name S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E . . .

But I am getting ahead of my story. I haven't introduced our company except for Monica, Props, and the Governor—and I haven't identified the last of those three.

We call Gilbert Usher the Governor out of sheer respect and affection. He's about the last of the old actor-managers. He hasn't the name of Gielgud or Olivier or Evans or Richardson, but he's spent most of a lifetime keeping Shakespeare alive, spreading that magical a-religious gospel in the more remote counties and the Dominions and the United States, like Benson once did. Our other actors aren't names at all—I refuse to tell you mine!—but with the exception of myself they're good troupers, or if they don't become that the first season, they drop out. Gruelingly long seasons, much uncomfortable traveling, and small profits are our destiny.

This particular season had got

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to that familiar point where the plays are playing smoothly and everyone's a bit tireder than he realizes and the restlessness sets in. Robert Dennis, our juvenile, was writing a novel of theatrical life (he said) mornings at the hotel—up at seven to slave at it, our Robert claimed. Poor old Guthrie Boyd had started to drink again, and drink quite too much, after an absteminous two months which had astonished everyone.

Francis Farley Scott, our leading man, had started to drop hints that he was going to organize a Shakespearean repertory company of his own next year and he began to have conspiratorial conversations with Gertrude Grainger, our leading lady, and to draw us furtively aside one by one to make us hypothetical offers, no exact salary named. F. F. is as old as the Governor—who is our star, of course—and he has no talents at all except for self-infatuation and a somewhat grandiose yet impressive fashion of acting. He's portly like an opera tenor and quite bald and he travels an assortment of thirty toupees, ranging from red to black shot with silver, which he alternates with shameless abandon—they're for wear offstage, not on. It doesn't matter to him that the company knows all about his multi-colored artificial toppings, for we're part of his world of illusion, and he's firmly convinced that the stage-struck local ladies he squires about never notice, or at any rate mind the deception. He once gave me a lecture on the subtleties of suiting the color of your hair to the lady you're trying to fascinate—her own age, hair color, and so on.

Every year F. F. plots to start a company of his own—it's a regular midseason routine with him—and every year it comes to nothing, for he's as lazy and impractical as he is vain. Yet F. F. believes he could play any part in Shakespeare or all of them at once in a pinch; perhaps the only F. F. Scott Company which would really satisfy him would be one in which he would be the only actor—a Shakespearean monologue; in fact, the one respect in which F. F. is not lazy is in his eagerness to double as many parts as possible in any single play.

F. F.'s yearly plots never bother the Governor a bit—he keeps waiting wistfully for F. F. to fix him with an hypnotic eye and in a hoarse whisper ask *him* to join the Scott company.

And I of course was hoping that now at last Monica Singleton would stop trying to be the most exquisite ingenue that ever came tripping Shakespeare's way (rehearsing her parts even in her sleep, I guessed, though I was miles from being in a position to know that for certain) and begin to take note and not just advantage of my devoted attentions.

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But then old Sybil Jameson bought the Ouija board and Gertrude Grainger dragooned an unwilling Monica into placing her fingertips on the planchette along with theirs "just for a lark." Next day Gertrude announced to several of us in a hushed voice that Monica had the most amazing undeveloped mediumistic talent she'd ever encountered, and from then on the girl was a Ouija-addict. Poor tight-drawn Monica, I suppose she had to explode out of her self-imposed Shakespearean discipline somehow, and it was just too bad it had to be the board instead of me. Though come to think of it, I shouldn't have felt quite so resentful of the board, for she might have exploded with Robert Dennis, which would have been infinitely worse, though we were never quite sure of Robert's sex. For that matter I wasn't sure of Gertrude's and suffered agonies of uncertain jealousy when she captured my beloved. I was obsessed with the vision of Gertrude's bold knees pressing Monica's under the Ouija board, though with Sybil's bony ones for chaperones, fortunately.

Francis Farley Scott, who was jealous too because this new toy had taken Gertrude's mind off their annual plottings, said rather spitefully that Monica must be one of those grabby girls who have to take command of whatever they get their fingers on, whether it's a man or a planchette, but Props told me he'd bet anything that Gertrude and Sybil had "followed" Monica's first random finger movements like the skillfulest dancers guiding a partner while seeming to yield, in order to coax her into the business and make sure of their third.

Sometimes I thought that F. F. was right and sometimes Props and sometimes I thought that Monica had a genuine supernatural talent, though I don't ordinarily believe in such things, and that last really frightened me, for such a person might give up live men for ghosts forever. She was such a sensitive, subtle, wraith-cheeked girl and she could get so keyed up and when she touched the planchette her eyes got such an empty look, as if her mind had traveled down into her fingertips or out to the ends of time and space. And once the three of them gave me a character reading from the board which embarrassed me with its accuracy. The same thing happened to several other people in the company. Of course, as Props pointed out, actors can be pretty good character analysts whenever they stop being egomaniacs.

After reading characters and foretelling the future for several weeks, our Three Weird Sisters got interested in reincarnation and began asking the board and then telling us what famous or infamous

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people we'd been in past lives. Gertrude Grainger had been Queen Boadicea, I wasn't surprised to hear. Sybil Jameson had been Cassandra. While Monica was once mad Queen Joanna of Castile and more recently a prize hysterical patient of Janet at the Salpetriere —touches which irritated and frightened me more than they should have. Billy Simpson—Props—had been an Egyptian silversmith under Queen Hatshepsut and later a servant of Samuel Pepys; he heard this with a delighted chuckle. Guthrie Boyd had been the Emperor Claudius and Robert Dennis had been Caligula. For some reason I had been both John Wilkes Booth and Lambert Simnel, which irritated me considerably, for I saw no romance but only neurosis in assassinating an American president and dying in a burning barn, or impersonating the Earl of Warwick, pretending unsuccessfully to the British throne, being pardoned for it—of all things!—and spending the rest of my life as a scullion in the kitchen of Henry VII and his son. The fact that both Booth and Simnel had been actors of a sort—a poor sort—naturally irritated me the more. Only much later did Monica confess to me that the board had probably made those decisions because I had had such a "tragic, dangerous, defeated look" —a revelation which surprised and flattered me.

Francis Farley Scott was flattered too, to hear he'd once been Henry VIII— he fancied all those wives and he wore his golden blond toupee after the show that night—until Gertrude and Sybil and Monica announced that the Governor was a reincarnation of no less than William Shakespeare himself. That made F. F. so jealous that he instantly sat down at the prop table, grabbed up a quill pen, and did an impromptu rendering of Shakespeare composing Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. It was an effective performance, though with considerably more frowning and eye-rolling and trying of lines for sound than I imagine Willy S. himself used originally, and when F. F. finished, even the Governor, who'd been standing unobserved in the shadows beside Props, applauded with the latter.

Governor kidded the pants off the idea of himself as Shakespeare. He said that if Willy S. were ever reincarnated it ought to be as a world-famous dramatist who was secretly in his spare time the world's greatest scientist and philosopher and left clues to his identity in his mathematical equations —that way he'd get his own back at Bacon, or rather the Baconians.

Yet I suppose if you had to pick someone for a reincarnation of Shakespeare, Gilbert Usher wouldn't be a bad choice. Insofar as a star and director ever can be, the

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Governor is gentle and self-effacing—as Shakespeare himself must have been, or else there would never have arisen that ridiculous Bacon-Oxford-Marlowe-Elizabeth-take-your-pick-who-wrote-Shakespeare controversy. And the Governor has a sweet melancholy about him, though he's handsomer and despite his years more athletic than one imagines Shakespeare being. And he's generous to a fault, especially where old actors who've done brave fine things in the past are concerned.

This season his mistake in that last direction had been in hiring Guthrie Boyd to play some of the more difficult older leading roles, including a couple F. F. usually handles: Brutus, Othello, and besides those Duncan in *Macbeth,* Kent in *King Lear,* and the Ghost in *Hamlet.*

Guthrie was a bellowing hard-drinking bear of an actor, who'd been a Shakespearean star in Australia and successfully smuggled some of his reputation west—he learned to moderate his bellowing, while his emotions were always simple and sincere, though explosive—and finally even spent some years in Hollywood. But there his drinking caught up with him, probably because of the stupid film parts he got, and he failed six times over. His wife divorced him. His children cut themselves off. He married a starlet and she divorced him. He dropped out of sight.

Then after several years the Governor ran into him. He'd been rusticating in Canada with a stubborn teetotal admirer. He was only a shadow of his former self, but there was some substance to the shadow—and he wasn't drinking. The Governor decided to take a chance on him—although the company manager Harry Grossman was dead set against it—and during rehearsals and the first month or so of performances it was wonderful to see how old Guthrie Boyd came back, exactly as if Shakespeare were a restorative medicine.

It may be stuffy or sentimental of me to say so, but you know, I think Shakespeare's good for people. I don't know of an actor, except myself, whose character hasn't been strengthened and his vision widened and charity quickened by working in the plays. I've heard that before Gilbert Usher became a Shakespearean, he was a more ruthlessly ambitious and critical man, not without malice, but the plays mellowed him, as they've mellowed Props's philosophy and given him a zest for life.

Because of his contact with Shakespeare, Robert Dennis is a less strident and pettish swish (if he is one), Gertrude Grainger's outbursts of cold rage have an undercurrent of queenly make-believe, and even Francis Farley Scott's grubby little seductions are probably kinder and less insultingly illusionary.

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In fact I sometimes think that what civilized serenity the British people possess, and small but real ability to smile at themselves, is chiefly due to their good luck in having had William Shakespeare born one of their company.

But I was telling how Guthrie Boyd performed very capably those first weeks, against the expectations of most of us, so that we almost quit holding our breaths—or sniffing at his. His Brutus was workmanlike, his Kent quite fine—that bluff rough honest part suited him well—and he regularly got admiring notices for his Ghost in *Hamlet*. I think his years of living death as a drinking alcoholic had given him an understanding of loneliness and frozen abilities and despair that he put to good use—probably unconsciously—in interpreting that small role.

He was really a most impressive figure in the part, even just visually. The Ghost's basic costume is simple enough—a big all-enveloping cloak that brushes the groundcloth, a big dull helmet with the tiniest battery light inside its peak to throw a faint green glow on the Ghost's features, and over the helmet a veil of greenish cheesecloth that registers as mist to the audience. He wears a suit of stage armor under the cloak, but that's not important and at a pinch he can do without it, for his cloak can cover his entire body.

The Ghost doesn't switch on his helmet-light until he makes his entrance, for fear of it being glimpsed by an edge of the audience, and nowadays because of that superstition or rule I told you about, he doesn't drop the cheesecloth veil until the last second either, but when Guthrie Boyd was playing the part that rule didn't exist and I have a vivid recollection of him standing in the wings, waiting to go on, a big bearish inscrutable figure about as solid and un-supernatural as a bushy seven-foot evergreen covered by a gray tarpaulin. But then when Guthrie would switch on the tiny light and stride smoothly and silently on stage and his hollow distant tormented voice boom out, there'd be a terrific shivery thrill, even for us backstage, as if we were listening to words that really had traveled across black windy infinite gulfs from the Afterworld or the Other Side.

At any rate Guthrie was a great Ghost, and adequate or a bit better than that in most of his other parts—for those first nondrinking weeks. He seemed very cheerful on the whole, modestly buoyed up by his comeback, though sometimes something empty and dead would stare for a moment out of his eyes—the old drinking alcoholic wondering what all this fatiguing sober nonsense was about. He was especially looking forward to our three-night-stand at Wolverton, although that was still two months in the future then. The reason was that

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both his children—married and with families now, of course—lived and worked at Wolverton and I'm sure he set great store on proving to them in person his rehabilitation, figuring it would lead to a reconciliation and so on.

But then came his first performance as Othello. (The Governor, although the star, always played Iago—an equal role, though not the title one.) Guthrie was almost too old for Othello, of course, and besides that, his health wasn't good—the drinking years had taken their toll of his stamina and the work of rehearsals and of first nights in eight different plays after years away from the theater had exhausted him. But somehow the old volcano inside him got seething again and he gave a magnificent performance. Next morning the papers raved about him and one review rated him even better than the Governor.

That did it, unfortunately. The glory of his triumph was too much for him. The next night—*Othello* again—he was drunk as a skunk. He remembered most of his lines—though the Governor had to throw him about every sixth one out of the side of his mouth—but he weaved and wobbled, he planked a big hand on the shoulder of every other character he addressed to keep from falling over, and he even forgot to put in his false teeth the first two acts, so that his voice was mushy. To cap that, he started really to strangle Gertrude Grainger in the last scene, until that rather brawny Desdemona, unseen by the audience, gave him a knee in the gut; then, after stabbing himself, he flung the prop dagger high in the flies so that it came down with two lazy twists and piercing the groundcloth buried its blunt point deep in the soft wood of the stage floor not three feet from Monica, who plays Iago's wife Emilia and so was lying dead on the stage at that point in the drama, murdered by her villainous husband—and might have been dead for real if the dagger had followed a slightly different trajectory.

Since a third performance of *Othello* was billed for the following night, the Governor had no choice but to replace Guthrie with Francis Farley Scott, who did a good job (for him) of covering up his satisfaction at getting his old role back. F. F., always a plushy and lascivious-eyed Moor, also did a good job with the part, coming in that way without even a brush-up rehearsal, so that one critic, catching the first and third shows, marveled how we could change big roles at will, thinking we'd done it solely to demonstrate our virtuosity.

Of course the Governor read the riot act to Guthrie and carried him off to a doctor, who without being prompted threw a big scare into him about his drinking and his

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heart, so that he just might have recovered from his lapse, except that two nights later we did *Julius Caesar* and Guthrie, instead of being satisfied with being workmanlike, decided to recoup himself with a really rousing performance. So he bellowed and groaned and bugged his eyes as I suppose he had done in his palmiest Australian days. His optimistic self-satisfaction between scenes was frightening to behold. Not too terrible a performance, truly, but the critics all panned him and one of them said, "Guthrie Boyd played Brutus —a bunch of vocal cords wrapped up in a toga."

That tied up the package and knotted it tight. Thereafter Guthrie was medium pie-eyed from morning to night—and often more than medium. The Governor had to yank him out of Brutus too (F. F. again replacing), but being the Governor he didn't sack him. He put him into a couple of bit parts—Montano and the Soothsayer—in *Othello* and *Caesar* and let him keep on at the others and he gave me and Joe Rubens and sometimes Props the job of keeping an eye on the poor old sot and making sure he got to the theater by the half hour and if possible not too plastered. Often he played the Ghost or the Doge of Venice in his street clothes under cloak or scarlet robe, but he played them. And many were the nights Joe and I made the rounds of half the local bars before we corraled him. The Governor sometimes refers to Joe Rubens and me in mild derision as "the American element" in his company, but just the same he depends on us quite a bit; and I certainly don't mind being one of his trouble-shooters—it's a joy to serve him.

All this may seem to contradict my statement about our getting to the point, about this time, where the plays were playing smoothly and the monotony setting in. But it doesn't really. There's always something going wrong in a theatrical company—anything else would be abnormal; just as the Samoans say no party is a success until somebody's dropped a plate or spilled a drink or tickled the wrong woman.

Besides, once Guthrie had got Othello and Brutus off his neck, he didn't do too badly. The little parts and even Kent he could play passably whether drunk or sober. King Duncan, for instance, and the Doge in *The Merchant* are easy to play drunk because the actor always has a couple of attendants to either side of him, who can guide his steps if he weaves and even hold him up if necessary—which can turn out to be an effective dramatic touch, registering as the infirmity of extreme age.

And somehow Guthrie continued to give that same masterful performance as the Ghost and get occasional notices for it. In fact

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Sybil Jameson insisted he was a shade better in the Ghost now that he was invariably drunk; which could have been true. And he still talked about the three-night-stand coming up in Wolverton, though now as often with gloomy apprehension as with proud fatherly anticipation.

Well, the three-night-stand eventually came. We arrived at Wolverton on a non-playing evening. To the surprise of most of us, but especially Guthrie, his son and daughter were there at the station to welcome him with their respective spouses and all their kids and numerous in-laws and a great gaggle of friends. Their cries of greeting when they spotted him, were almost an organized cheer and I looked around for a brass band to strike up.

I found out later that Sybil Jameson, who knew them, had been sending them all his favorable notices, so that they were eager as weasels to be reconciled with him and show him off as blatantly as possible.

When he saw his childrens' and grandchildrens' faces and realized the cries were for him, old Guthrie got red in the face and beamed like the sun, and they closed in around him and carried him off in triumph for an evening of celebrations.

Next day I heard from Sybil, whom they'd carried off with him, that everything had gone beautifully. He'd drunk like a fish, but kept marvellous control, so that no one but she noticed, and the warmth of the reconciliation of Guthrie to everyone, complete strangers included, had been wonderful to behold. Guthrie's son-in-law, a pugnacious chap, had got angry when he'd heard Guthrie wasn't to play Brutus the third night, and he declared that Gilbert Usher must be jealous of his magnificent father-in-law. Everything was forgiven twenty times over. They'd even tried to put old Sybil to bed with Guthrie, figuring romantically, as people will about actors, that she must be his mistress. All this was very fine, and of course wonderful for Guthrie, and for Sybil too in a fashion, yet I suppose the unconstrained night-long bash, after two months of uninterrupted semi-controlled drunkenness, was just about the worst thing anybody could have done to the old boy's sodden body and laboring heart.

Meanwhile on that first evening I accompanied Joe Rubens and Props to the theater we were playing at Wolverton to make sure the scenery got stacked right and the costume trunks were all safely arrived and stowed. Joe is our stage manager besides doing rough or Hebraic parts like Caliban and Tubal—he was a professional boxer in his youth and got his nose smashed crooked. Once I started to take boxing lessons from him, fig-

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uring an actor should know everything, but during the third lesson I walked into a gentle right cross and although it didn't exactly stun me there were bells ringing faintly in my head for six hours afterwards and I lived in a world of faery and that was the end of my fistic career. Joe is actually a most versatile actor—for instance, he understudies the Governor in Macbeth, Lear, Iago, and of course Shylock—though his brutal moon-face is against him, especially when his make-up doesn't include a beard. But he dotes on being genial and in the States he often gets a job by day playing Santa Claus in big department stores during the month before Christmas.

The Monarch was a cavernous old place, very grimy backstage, but with a great warren of dirty little dressing rooms and even a property room shaped like an L stage left. Its empty shelves were thick with dust.

There hadn't been a show in the Monarch for over a year, I saw from the yellowing sheets thumbtacked to the callboard as I tore them off and replaced them with a simple black-crayoned HAMLET: TONIGHT AT 8:30.

Then I noticed, by the cold inadequate working lights, a couple of tiny dark shapes dropping down from the flies and gliding around in wide swift circles—out into the house too, since the curtain was up. Bats, I realized with a little start—the Monarch was really halfway through the lich gate. The bats would fit very nicely with *Macbeth,* I told myself, but not so well with *The Merchant of Venice,* while with Hamlet they should neither help nor hinder, provided they didn't descend in nightfighter squadrons; it would be nice if they stuck to the Ghost scenes.

I'm sure the Governor had decided we'd open at Wolverton with *Hamlet* so that Guthrie would have the best chance of being a hit in his children's home city.

Billy Simpson, shoving his properties table into place just in front of the dismal L of the prop room, observed cheerfully, "It's a proper haunted house. The girls'll find some rare ghosts here, I'll wager, if they work their board."

Which turned out to be far truer than he realized at the time—I think.

"Bruce!" Joe Rubens called to me. "We better buy a couple of rat-traps and set them out. There's something scuttling back of the drops."

But when I entered the Monarch next night, well before the hour, by the creaky thick metal stage door, the place had been swept and tidied a bit. With the groundcloth down and the *Hamlet* set up, it didn't look too terrible, even though the curtain was still unlowered, dimly showing the house and its curves of empty seats and the two faint green exit lights

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with no one but myself to look at them.

There was a little pool of light around the callboard stage right, and another glow the other side of the stage beyond the wings, and lines of light showing around the edges of the door of the second dressing room, next to the star's.

I started across the dark stage, sliding my shoes softly so as not to trip over a cable or stage-screw and brace, and right away I got the magic electric feeling I often do in an empty theater the night of a show. Only this time there was something additional, something that started a shiver crawling down my neck. It wasn't, I think, the thought of the bats which might now be swooping around me unseen, skirling their inaudibly shrill trumpet calls, or even of the rats which *might* be watching sequin-eyed from behind trunks and flats, although not an hour ago Joe had told me that the traps he'd actually procured and set last night had been empty today.

No, it was more as if all of Shakespeare's characters were invisibly there around me—all the infinite possibilities of the theater. I imagined Rosalind and Falstaff and Prospero standing arm-in-arm watching me with different smiles. And Caliban grinning down from where he silently swung in the flies. And side by side, but unsmiling and not arm-in-arm: Macbeth and Iago and Dick the Three Eyes —Richard III. And all the rest of Shakespeare's myriad-minded good-evil crew.

I passed through the wings opposite and there in the second pool of light Billy Simpson sat behind his table with the properties for *Hamlet* set out on it: the skulls, the foils, the lantern, the purses, the parchmenty letters, Ophelia's flowers, and all the rest. It was odd Props having everything ready quite so early and a bit odd too that he should be alone, for Props has the un-actorish habit of making friends with all sorts of locals, such as policemen and porters and flower women and newsboys and shopkeepers and tramps who claim they're indigent actors, and even inviting them backstage with him —a fracture of rules which the Governor allows since Props is such a sensible chap. He has a great liking for people, especially low people, Props has, and for all the humble details of life. He'd make a good writer, I'd think, except for his utter lack of dramatic flair and story-skill—a sort of prosiness that goes with his profession.

And now he was sitting at his table, his stooped shoulders almost inside the doorless entry to the empty-shelfed prop room—no point in using it for a three-night-stand—and he was gazing at me quizzically. He has a big forehead —the light was on that—and a tapering chin—that was in shad-

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ow—and rather large eyes, which were betwixt the light and the dark. Sitting there like that, he seemed to me for a moment (mostly because of the outspread props, I guess) like the midnight Master of the Show in *The Rubaiyat* round whom all the rest of us move like shadow shapes.

Usually he has a quick greeting for anyone, but tonight he was silent, and that added to the illusion.

"Props," I said, "this theater's got a supernatural smell."

His expression didn't change at that, but he solemnly sniffed the air in several little whiffles adding up to one big inhalation, and as he did so he threw his head back, bringing his weakish chin into the light and shattering the illusion.

"Dust," he said after a moment. "Dust and old plush and scenery water-paint and sweat and drains and gelatin and greasepaint and powder and a breath of whisky. But the supernatural . . . no, I can't smell that. Unless . . ." And he sniffed again, but shook his head.

I chuckled at his materialism—although that touch about whisky did seem fanciful, since I hadn't been drinking and Props never does and Guthrie Boyd was nowhere in evidence. Props has a mind like a notebook for sensory details—and for the minutia of human habits too. It was Props, for instance, who told me about the actual notebook in which John McCarthy (who would be playing Fortinbras and the Player King in a couple of hours) jots down the exact number of hours he sleeps each night and keeps totting them up, so he knows when he'll have to start sleeping extra hours to average the full nine he thinks he must get each night to keep from dying.

It was also Props who pointed out to me that F. F. is much more careless gumming his offstage toupees to his head than his theater wigs—a studied carelessness, like that in tying a bowtie, he assured me; it indicated, he said, a touch of contempt for the whole offstage world.

Props isn't *only* a detail-worm, but it's perhaps because he is one that he has sympathy for all human hopes and frailties, even the most trivial, like my selfish infatuation with Monica.

Now I said to him, "I didn't mean an actual smell, Billy. But back there just now I got the feeling anything might happen tonight."

He nodded slowly and solemnly. With anyone but Props I'd have wondered if he weren't a little drunk. Then he said, "You were on a stage. You know, the science-fiction writers are missing a bet there. We've got time machines right now. Theaters. Theaters are time machines and spaceships too. They take people on trips through the future and the past and the

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elsewhere and the might-have-been—yes, and if it's done well enough, give them glimpses of Heaven and Hell."

I nodded back at him. Such grotesque fancies are the closest Props ever comes to escaping from prosiness.

I said, "Well, let's hope Guthrie gets aboard the spaceship before the curtain up-jets. Tonight we're depending on his children having the sense to deliver him here intact. Which from what Sybil says about them is not to be taken for granted."

Props stared at me owlishly and slowly shook his head. "Guthrie got here about ten minutes ago," he said, "and looking no drunker than usual."

"That's a relief," I told him, meaning it.

"The girls are having a Ouija session," he went on, as if he were determined to account for all of us from moment to moment. "They smelt the supernatural here, just as you did, and they're asking the board to name the culprit." Then he stooped so that he looked almost hunchbacked and he felt for something under the table.

I nodded. I'd guessed the Ouija-part from the lines of light showing around the door of Gertrude Grainger's dressing room.

Props straightened up and he had a pint bottle of whisky in his hand. I don't think a loaded revolver would have dumbfounded me as much. He unscrewed the top.

"There's the Governor coming in," he said tranquilly, hearing the stage door creak and evidently some footsteps my own ears missed. "That's seven of us in the theater before the hour."

He took a big slow swallow of whisky and recapped the bottle, as naturally as if it were a nightly action. I goggled at him without comment. What he was doing was simply unheard of—for Billy Simpson.

At that moment there was a sharp scream and a clatter of thin wood and something twangy and metallic falling and a scurry of footsteps. Our previous words must have cocked a trigger in me, for I was at Gertrude Grainger's dressing-room door as fast as I could sprint—no worry this time about tripping over cables or braces in the dark.

I yanked the door open and there by the bright light of the bulbs framing the mirror were Gertrude and Sybil sitting close together with the Ouija board face down on the floor in front of them along with a flimsy wire-backed chair, overturned. While pressing back into Gertrude's costumes hanging on the rack across the little room, almost as if she wanted to hide behind them like bedclothes, was Monica pale and staring-eyed. She didn't seem to recognize me. The dark-green heavily

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brocaded costume Gertrude wears as the Queen in *Hamlet*, into which Monica was chiefly pressing herself, accentuated her pallor. All three of them were in their street-clothes.

I went to Monica and put an arm around her and gripped her hand. It was cold as ice. She was standing rigidly.

While I was doing that Gertrude stood up and explained in rather haughty tones what I told you earlier: about them asking the board who the ghost was haunting the Monarch tonight and the planchette spelling out S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E . . .

"I don't know why it startled you so, dear," she ended crossly, speaking to Monica. "It's very natural his spirit should attend performances of his plays."

I felt the slim body I clasped relax a little. That relieved me. I was selfishly pleased at having got an arm around it, even under such public and unamorous circumstances, while at the same time my silly mind was thinking that if Props had been lying to me about Guthrie Boyd having come in no more drunken than usual (this new Props who drank straight whisky in the theater could lie too, I supposed) why then we could certainly use William Shakespeare tonight, since the Ghost in *Hamlet* is the one part in all his plays Shakespeare himself is supposed to have acted on the stage.

"I don't know why myself now," Monica suddenly answered from beside me, shaking her head as if to clear it. She became aware of me at last, started to pull away, then let my arm stay around her.

The next voice that spoke was the Governor's. He was standing in the doorway, smiling faintly, with Props peering around his shoulder. Props would be as tall as the Governor if he ever straightened up, but his stoop takes almost a foot off his height.

The Governor said softly, a comic light in his eyes, "I think we should be content to bring Shakespeare's plays to life, without trying for their author. It's hard enough on the nerves just to *act* Shakespeare."

He stepped forward with one of his swift, naturally graceful movements and kneeling on one knee he picked up the fallen board and planchette. "At all events I'll take these in charge for tonight. Feeling better now, Miss Singleton?" he asked as he straightened and stepped back.

"Yes, quite all right," she answered flusteredly, disengaging my arm and pulling away from me rather too quickly.

He nodded. Gertrude Grainger was staring at him coldly, as if about to say something scathing, but she didn't. Sybil Jameson was looking at the floor. She seemed embarrassed, yet puzzled too.

I followed the Governor out of

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the dressing room and told him, in case Props hadn't, about Guthrie Boyd coming to the theater early. My momentary doubt of Props's honesty seemed plain silly to me now, although his taking that drink remained an astonishing riddle.

Props confirmed me about Guthrie coming in, though his manner was a touch abstracted.

The Governor nodded his thanks for the news, then twitched a nostril and frowned. I was sure he'd caught a whiff of alcohol and didn't know to which of us two to attribute it—or perhaps even to one of the ladies, or to an earlier passage of Guthrie this way.

He said to me, "Would you come into my dressing room for a bit, Bruce?"

I followed him, thinking he'd picked me for the drinker and wondering how to answer—best perhaps simply silently accept the fatherly lecture—but when he'd turned on the lights and I'd shut the door, his first question was, "You're attracted to Miss Singleton, aren't you, Bruce?"

When I nodded abruptly, swallowing my morsel of surprise, he went on softly but emphatically, "Then why don't you quit hovering and playing Galahad and really go after her? Ordinarily I must appear to frown on affairs in the company, but in this case it would be the best way I know of to break up those Ouija sessions, which are obviously harming the girl."

I managed to grin and tell him I'd be happy to obey his instructions—and do it entirely on my own initiative too.

He grinned back and started to toss the Ouija board on his couch, but instead put it and the planchette carefully down on the end of his long dressing table and put a second question to me.

"What do you think of some of this stuff they're getting over the board, Bruce?"

I said, "Well, that last one gave me a shiver, all right—I suppose because . . ." and I told him about sensing the presence of Shakespeare's characters in the dark. I finished, "But of course the whole idea is nonsense," and I grinned.

He didn't grin back.

I continued impulsively, "There was one idea they had a few weeks back that impressed me, though it didn't seem to impress you. I hope you won't think I'm trying to butter you up, Mr. Usher. I mean the idea of you being a reincarnation of William Shakespeare."

He laughed delightedly and said, "Clearly you don't yet know the difference between a player and a playwright, Bruce. Shakespeare striding about romantically with head thrown back?—and twirling a sword and shaping his body and voice to every feeling handed him? Oh no! I'll grant he might have played the Ghost—it's a part within the scope of an aver-

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age writer's talents, requiring nothing more than that he stand still and sound off sepulchrally."

He paused and smiled and went on. "No, there's only one person in this company who might be Shakespeare come again, and that's Billy Simpson. Yes, I mean Props. He's a great listener and he knows how to put himself in touch with everyone and then he's got that rat-trap mind for every hue and scent and sound of life, inside or out the mind. And he's very analytic. Oh, I know he's got no poetic talent, but surely Shakespeare wouldn't have that in *every* reincarnation. I'd think he'd need about a dozen lives in which to gather material for every one in which he gave it dramatic form. Don't you find something very poignant in the idea of a mute inglorious Shakespeare spending whole humble lifetimes collecting the necessary stuff for one great dramatic burst? Think about it some day."

I was doing that already and finding it a fascinating fantasy. It crystalized so perfectly the feeling I'd got seeing Billy Simpson behind his property table. And then Props did have a high-foreheaded poet-schoolmaster's face like that given Shakespeare in the posthumous engravings and woodcuts and portraits. Why, even their initials were the same. It made me feel strange.

Then the Governor put his third question to me.

"He's drinking tonight, isn't he? I mean Props, not Guthrie."

I didn't say anything, but my face must have answered for me—at least to such a student of expressions as the Governor—for he smiled and said, "You needn't worry. I wouldn't be angry with him. In fact, the only other time I know of that Props drank spirits by himself in the theater, I had a great deal to thank him for." His lean face grew thoughtful. "It was long before your time, in fact it was the first season I took out a company of my own. I had barely enough money to pay the printer for the three-sheets and get the first-night curtain up. After that it was touch and go for months. Then in midseason we had a run of bad luck—a two-night heavy fog in one city, an influenza scare in another, Harvey Wilkins' Shakespearean troupe two weeks ahead of us in a third. And when in the next town we played it turned out the advance sale was very light—because my name was unknown there and the theater an unpopular one—I realized I'd have to pay off the company while there was still money enough to get them home, if not the scenery.

"That night I caught Props swigging, but I hadn't the heart to chide him for it—in fact I don't think I'd have blamed anyone, except perhaps myself, for getting drunk that night. But then during the performance the actors and

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even the union stagehands we travel began coming to my dressing room by ones and twos and telling me they'd be happy to work without salary for another three weeks, if I thought that might give us a chance of recouping. Well, of course I grabbed at their offers and we got a spell of brisk pleasant weather and we hit a couple of places starved for Shakespeare, and things worked out, even to paying all the back salary owed before the season was ended.

"Later on I discovered it was Props who had put them all up to doing it."

Gilbert Usher looked up at me and one of his eyes was wet and his lips were working just a little. "I couldn't have done it myself," he said, "for I wasn't a popular man with my company that first season—I'd been riding everyone much too hard and with nasty sarcasms—and I hadn't yet learned how to ask anyone for help when I really needed it. But Billy Simpson did what I couldn't, though he had to nerve himself for it with spirits. He's quick enough with his tongue in ordinary circumstances, as you know, particularly when he's being the friendly listener, but apparently when something very special is required of him, he must drink himself to the proper pitch. I'm wondering . . ."

His voice trailed off and then he straightened up before his mirror and started to unknot his tie and he said to me briskly, "Better get dressed now, Bruce. And then look in on Guthrie, will you?"

My mind was churning some rather strange thoughts as I hurried up the iron stairs to the dressing room I shared with Robert Dennis. I got on my Guildenstern make-up and costume, finishing just as Robert arrived; as Laertes, Robert makes a late entrance and so needn't hurry to the theater on *Hamlet* nights. Also, although we don't make a point of it, he and I spend as little time together in the dressing room as we can.

Before going down I looked into Guthrie Boyd's. He wasn't there, but the lights were on and the essentials of the Ghost's costume weren't in sight—impossible to miss that big helmet!—so I assumed he'd gone down ahead of me.

It was almost the half-hour. The house lights were on, the curtain down, more stage lights on too, and quite a few of us about. I noticed that Props was back in the chair behind his table and not looking particularly different from any other night—perhaps the drink had been a once-only aberration and not some symptom of a crisis in the company.

I didn't make a point of hunting for Guthrie. When he gets costumed early he generally stands back in a dark corner somewhere, wanting to be alone—perchance to sip, aye, there's the rub!—or

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visits with Sybil in her dressing room.

I spotted Monica sitting on a trunk by the switchboard, where backstage was brightest lit at the moment. She looked ethereal yet springlike in her blonde Ophelia wig and first costume, a pale green one. Recalling my happy promise to the Governor, I bounced up beside her and asked her straight out about the Ouija business, pleased to have something to the point besides the plays to talk with her about—and really not worrying as much about her nerves as I suppose I should have.

She was in a very odd mood, both agitated and abstracted, her gaze going back and forth between distant and near and very distant. My questions didn't disturb her at all, in fact I got the feeling she welcomed them, yet she genuinely didn't seem able to tell me much about why she'd been so frightened at the last name the board had spelled. She told me that she actually did get into a sort of dream state when she worked the board and that she'd screamed before she'd quite comprehended what had shocked her so; then her mind had blacked out for a few seconds, she thought.

"One thing though, Bruce," she said. "I'm not going to work the board any more, at least when the three of us are alone like that."

"That sounds like a wise idea," I agreed, trying not to let the extreme heartiness of my agreement show through.

She stopped peering around as if for some figure to appear that wasn't in the play and didn't belong backstage, and she laid her hand on mine and said, "Thanks for coming so quickly when I went idiot and screamed."

I was about to improve this opportunity by telling her that the reason I'd come so quickly was that she was so much in my mind, but just then Joe Rubens came hurrying up with the Governor behind him in his Hamlet black to tell me that neither Guthrie Boyd nor his Ghost costume was to be found anywhere in the theater.

What's more, Joe had got the phone numbers of Guthrie's son and daughter from Sybil and rung them up. The one phone hadn't answered, while on the other a female voice—presumably a maid's—had informed him that everyone had gone to see Guthrie Boyd in *Hamlet*.

Joe was already wearing his cumbrous chain-mail armor for Marcellus—woven cord silvered—so I knew I was elected. I ran upstairs and in the space of time it took Robert Dennis to guess my mission and advise me to try the dingiest bars first and have a drink or two myself in them, I'd put on my hat, overcoat, and wristwatch and left him.

So garbed and as usual nervous about people looking at my ankles,

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I sallied forth to comb the nearby bars of Wolverton. I consoled myself with the thought that if I found Hamlet's father's ghost drinking his way through them, no one would ever spare a glance for my own costume.

Almost on the stroke of curtain I returned, no longer giving a damn what anyone thought about my ankles. I hadn't found Guthrie or spoken to a soul who'd seen a large male imbiber—most likely of Irish whisky—in great-cloak and antique armor, with perhaps some ghostly green light cascading down his face.

Beyond the curtain the overture was fading to its sinister close and the backstage lights were all down, but there was an angry hushed-voice dispute going on stage left, where the Ghost makes all his entrances and exits. Skipping across the dim stage in front of the blue-lit battlements of Elsinore—I still in my hat and overcoat—I found the Governor and Joe Rubens and with them John McCarthy all ready to go on as the Ghost in his Fortinbras armor with a dark cloak and some green gauze over it.

But alongside them was Francis Farley Scott in a very similar get-up—no armor, but a big enough cloak to hide his King costume and a rather more impressive helmet than John's.

They were all very dim in the midnight glow leaking back from the dimmed-down blue floods. The five of us were the only people I could see on this side of the stage.

F. F. was arguing vehemently that he must be allowed to double the Ghost with King Claudius because he knew the part better than John and because—this was the important thing—he could imitate Guthrie's voice perfectly enough to deceive his children and perhaps save their illusions about him. Sybil had looked through the curtain hole and seen them and all of their yesterday crowd, with new recruits besides, occupying all of the second, third, and fourth rows center, chattering with excitement and beaming with anticipation. Harry Grossman had confirmed this from the front of the house.

I could tell that the Governor was vastly irked at F. F. and at the same time touched by the last part of his argument. It was exactly the sort of sentimental heroic rationalization with which F. F. cloaked his insatiable yearnings for personal glory. Very likely he believed it himself.

John McCarthy was simply ready to do what the Governor asked him. He's an actor untroubled by inward urgencies—except things like keeping a record of the hours he sleeps and each penny he spends—though with a natural facility for portraying on stage emotions which he doesn't feel one iota.

The Governor shut up F. F. with

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a gesture and got ready to make his decision, but just then I saw that there was a sixth person on this side of the stage.

Standing in the second wings beyond our group was a dark figure like a tarpaulined Christmas tree topped by a big helmet of unmistakable general shape despite its veiling. I grabbed the Governor's arm and pointed at it silently. He smothered a large curse and strode up to it and rasped, "Guthrie, you old Son of a B! Can you go on?" The figure gave an affirmative grunt.

Joe Rubens grimaced at me as if to say "Show business!" and grabbed a spear from the prop table and hurried back across the stage for his entrance as Marcellus just before the curtain lifted and the first nervous, superbly atmospheric lines of the play rang out, loud at first, but then going low with unspoken apprehension.

"Who's there?"

"Nay, answer me; stand, and unfold yourself."

"Long live the king!"

"Bernardo?"

"He."

"You come most carefully upon your hour."

"'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco."

"For this relief much thanks; 'tis bitter cold and I am sick at heart."

"Have you had quiet guard?"

"Not a mouse stirring."

With a resigned shrug, John McCarthy simply sat down. F. F. did the same, though *his* gesture was clench-fisted and exasperated. For a moment it seemed to me very comic that two Ghosts in *Hamlet* should be sitting in the wings, watching a third perform. I unbuttoned my overcoat and slung it over my left arm.

The Ghost's first two appearances are entirely silent ones. He merely goes on stage, shows himself to the soldiers, and comes off again. Nevertheless there was a determined little ripple of hand-clapping from the audience—the second, third, and fourth rows center greeting their patriarchal hero, it seemed likely. Guthrie didn't fall down at any rate and he walked reasonably straight—an achievement perhaps rating applause, if anyone out there knew the degree of intoxication Guthrie was probably burdened with at this moment—a cask-bellied Old Man of the Sea on his back.

The only thing out of normal was that he had forgot to turn on the little green light in the peak of his helmet—an omission which hardly mattered, certainly not on this first appearance. I hurried up to him when he came off and told him about it in a whisper as he moved off toward a dark backstage corner. I got in reply, through the inscrutable green veil, an exhalation of whisky and three affirmative grunts: one, that he

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knew it; two, that the light was working; three, that he'd remember to turn it on next time.

Then the scene had ended and I darted across the stage as they changed to the room-of-state set. I wanted to get rid of my overcoat. Joe Rubens grabbed me and told me about Guthrie's green light not being on and I told him that was all taken care of.

"Where the hell was he all the time we were hunting for him?" Joe asked me.

"I don't know," I answered.

By that time the second scene was playing, with F. F., his Ghost-coverings shed, playing the King as well as he always does (it's about his best part) and Gertrude Grainger looking very regal beside him as the Queen, her namesake, while there was another flurry of applause, more scattered this time, for the Governor in his black doublet and tights beginning about his seven hundredth performance of Shakespeare's longest and meatiest role.

Monica was still sitting on the trunk by the switchboard, looking paler than ever under her make-up, it seemed to me, and I folded my overcoat and silently persuaded her to use it as a cushion. I sat beside her and she took my hand and we watched the play from the wings.

After a while I whispered to her, giving her hand a little squeeze, "Feeling better now?"

She shook her head. Then leaning toward me, her mouth close to my ear, she whispered rapidly and unevenly, as if she just had to tell someone, "Bruce, I'm frightened. There's something in the theater. I don't think that was Guthrie playing the Ghost."

I whispered back, "Sure it was. I talked with him."

"Did you see his face?" she asked.

"No, but I smelled his breath," I told her and explained to her about him forgetting to turn on the green light. I continued, "Francis and John were both ready to go on as the Ghost, though, until Guthrie turned up. Maybe you glimpsed one of them before the play started and that gave you the idea it wasn't Guthrie."

Sybil Jameson in her Player costume looked around at me warningly. I was letting my whispering get too loud.

Monica put her mouth so close that her lips for an instant brushed my ear and she mouse-whispered, "I don't mean another *person* playing the Ghost—not that exactly. Bruce, there's *something* in the theater."

"You've got to forget that Ouija nonsense," I told her sharply. "And buck up now," I added, for the curtain had just gone down on Scene Two and it was time for her to get on stage for her scene with Laertes and Polonius.

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I waited until she was launched into it, speaking her lines brightly enough, and then I carefully crossed the stage behind the backdrop. I was sure there was no more than nerves and imagination to her notions, though they'd raised shivers on me, but just the same I wanted to speak to Guthrie again and see his face.

When I'd completed my slow trip (you have to move rather slowly, so the drop won't ripple or bulge), I was dumbfounded to find myself witnessing the identical backstage scene that had been going on when I'd got back from my tour of the bars. Only now there was a lot more light because the scene being played on stage was a bright one. And Props was there behind his table, watching everything like the spectator he basically is. But beyond him were Francis Farley Scott and John McCarthy in their improvised Ghost costumes again, and the Governor and Joe with them, and all of them carrying on that furious lip-reader's argument, now doubly hushed.

I didn't have to wait to get close to them to know that Guthrie must have disappeared again. As I made my way toward them, watching their silent antics, my silly mind became almost hysterical with the thought that Guthrie had at last discovered that invisible hole every genuine alcoholic wishes he had, into which he could decorously disappear and drink during the times between his absolutely necessary appearances in the real world.

As I neared them, Donald Fryer (our Horatio) came from behind me, having made the trip behind the backdrop faster than I had, to tell the Governor in hushed gasps that Guthrie wasn't in any of the dressing rooms or anywhere else stage right.

Just at that moment the bright scene ended, the curtain came down, the drapes before which Ophelia and the others had been playing swung back to reveal again the battlements of Elsinore, and the lighting shifted back to the midnight blue of the first scene, so that for the moment it was hard to see at all. I heard the Governor say decisively, "*You* play the Ghost," his voice receding as he and Joe and Don hurried across the stage to be in place for their proper entrance. Seconds later there came the dull soft hiss of the main curtain opening and I heard the Governor's taut resonant voice saying, "The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold," and Don responding as Horatio with, "It is a nipping and an eager air."

By that time I could see again well enough—see Francis Farley Scott and John McCarthy moving side by side toward the back wing through which the Ghost enters. They were still arguing in whispers. The explanation was clear

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enough: each thought the Governor had pointed at him in the sudden darkness—or possibly in F. F.'s case was pretending he so thought. For a moment the comic side of my mind, grown a bit hysterical by now, almost collapsed me with the thought of twin Ghosts entering the stage side by side. Then once again, history still repeating itself, I saw beyond them that other bulkier figure with the unmistakable shrouded helmet. They must have seen it too for they stopped dead just before my hands touched a shoulder of each of them. I circled quickly past them and reached out my hands to put them lightly on the third figure's shoulders, intending to whisper, "Guthrie, are you okay?" It was a very stupid thing for one actor to do to another—startling him just before his entrance—but I was made thoughtless by the memory of Monica's fears and by the rather frantic riddle of where Guthrie could possibly have been hiding.

But just then Horatio gasped, "Look, my lord, it comes," and Guthrie moved out of my light grasp onto the stage without so much as turning his head—and leaving me shaking because where I'd touched the rough buckram-braced fabric of the Ghost's cloak I'd felt only a kind of insubstantiality beneath instead of Guthrie's broad shoulders.

I quickly told myself that was because Guthrie's cloak had stood out from his shoulders and his back as he had moved. I had to tell myself something like that. I turned around. John McCarthy and F. F. were standing in front of the dark prop table and by now my nerves were in such a state that their paired forms gave me another start. But I tiptoed after them into the downstage wings and watched the scene from there.

The Governor was still on his knees with his sword held hilt up like a cross doing the long speech that begins, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" And of course the Ghost had his cloak drawn around him so you couldn't see what was under it—and the little green light still wasn't lit in his helmet. Tonight the absence of that theatric touch made him a more frightening figure—certainly to me, who wanted so much to see Guthrie's ravaged old face and be reassured by it. Though there was still enough comedy left in the ragged edges of my thoughts that I could imagine Guthrie's pugnacious son-in-law whispering angrily to those around him that Gilbert Usher was so jealous of his great father-in-law that he wouldn't let him show his face on the stage.

Then came the transition to the following scene where the Ghost has led Hamlet off alone with him—just a five-second complete darkening of the stage while a scrim is dropped—and at last the Ghost

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spoke those first lines of "Mark me" and "My hour is almost come, When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames Must render up myself."

If any of us had any worries about the Ghost blowing up on his lines or slurring them drunkenly, they were taken care of now. Those lines were delivered with the greatest authority and effect. And I was almost certain that it was Guthrie's rightful voice—at least I was at first—but doing an even better job than the good one he had always done of getting the effect of distance and otherworldliness and hopeless alienation from all life on Earth. The theater became silent as death, yet at the same time I could imagine the soft pounding of a thousand hearts, thousands of shivers crawling—and I *knew* that Francis Farley Scott, whose shoulder was pressed against mine, was trembling.

Each word the Ghost spoke was like a ghost itself, mounting the air and hanging poised for an impossible extra instant before it faded towards eternity.

Those great lines came: "I am thy father's spirit; Doomed for a certain term to walk the night . . ." and just at that moment the idea came to me that Guthrie Boyd might be dead, that he might have died and be lying unnoticed somewhere between his children's home and the theater—no matter what Props had said or the rest of us had seen—and that his ghost might have come to give a last performance. And on the heels of that shivery impossibility came the thought that similar and perhaps even eerier ideas must be frightening Monica. I knew I had to go to her.

So while the Ghost's words swooped and soared in the dark—marvellous black-plumed birds—I again made that nervous cross behind the back drop.

Everyone stage right was standing as frozen and absorbed—motionless loomings—as I'd left John and F. F. I spotted Monica at once. She'd moved forward from the switchboard and was standing, crouched a little, by the big floodlight that throws some dimmed blue on the backdrop and across the back of the stage. I went to her just as the Ghost was beginning his exit stage left, moving backward along the edge of the light from the flood, but not quite in it, and reciting more lonelily and eerily than I'd ever heard them before those memorable last lines:

"Fare thee well at once!
"The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
"And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire;
"Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me."

One second passed, then another, and then there came two unexpected bursts of sound at the

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same identical instant: Monica screamed and a thunderous applause started out front, touched off by Guthrie's people, of course, but this time swiftly spreading to all the rest of the audience.

I imagine it was the biggest hand the Ghost ever got in the history of the theater. In fact, I never heard of him getting a hand before. It certainly was a most inappropriate place to clap, however much the performance deserved it. It broke the atmosphere and the thread of the scene.

Also, it drowned out Monica's scream, so that only I and a few of those behind me heard it.

At first I thought I'd made her scream, by touching her as I had Guthrie, suddenly, like an idiot, from behind. But instead of shrinking or dodging away she turned and clung to me, and kept clinging too even after I'd drawn her back and Gertrude Grainger and Sybil Jameson had closed in to comfort her and hush her gasping sobs and try to draw her away from me.

By this time the applause was through and Governor and Don and Joe were taking up the broken scene and knitting together its finish as best they could, while the floods came up little by little, changing to rosy, to indicate dawn breaking over Elsinore.

Then Monica mastered herself and told us in quick whispers what had made her scream. The Ghost, she said, had moved for a moment into the edge of the blue floodlight, and she had seen for a moment through his veil, and what she had seen had been a face like Shakespeare's. Just that and no more. Except that at the moment when she told us—later she became less certain—she was sure it was Shakespeare himself and no one else.

I discovered then that when you hear something like that you don't exclaim or get outwardly excited. Or even inwardly, exactly. It rather shuts you up. I know I felt at the same time extreme awe and a renewed irritation at the Ouija board. I was deeply moved, yet at the same time pettishly irked, as if some vast adult creature had disordered the toy world of my universe.

It seemed to hit Sybil and even Gertrude the same way. For the moment we were shy about the whole thing, and so, in her way, was Monica, and so were the few others who had overheard in part or all what Monica had said.

I knew we were going to cross the stage in a few more seconds when the curtain came down on that scene, ending the first act, and stagelights came up. At least I knew that I was going across. Yet I wasn't looking forward to it.

When the curtain did come down—with another round of applause from out front—and we started across, Monica beside me with my arm still tight around

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her, there came a choked-off male cry of horror from ahead to shock and hurry us. I think about a dozen of us got stage left about the same time, including of course the Governor and the others who had been on stage.

F. F. and Props were standing inside the doorway to the empty prop room and looking down into the hidden part of the L. Even from the side, they both looked pretty sick. Then F. F. knelt down and almost went out of view, while Props hunched over him with his natural stoop.

As we craned around Props for a look—myself among the first, just beside the Governor, we saw something that told us right away that this Ghost wasn't ever going to be able to answer that curtain call they were still fitfully clapping for out front, although the house lights must be up by now for the first intermission.

Guthrie Boyd was lying on his back in his street clothes. His face looked gray, the eyes staring straight up. While swirled beside him lay the Ghost's cloak and veil and the helmet and an empty fifth of whiskey.

Between the two conflicting shocks of Monica's revelation and the body in the prop room, my mind was in a useless state. And from her helpless incredulous expression I knew Monica felt the same. I tried to put things together and they wouldn't fit anywhere.

F. F. looked up at us over his shoulder. "He's not breathing," he said. "I think he's gone." Just the same he started loosing Boyd's tie and shirt and pillowing his head on the cloak. He handed the whisky bottle back to us through several hands and Joe Rubens got rid of it.

The Governor sent out front for a doctor and within two minutes Harry Grossman was bringing us one from the audience who'd left his seat number and bag at the box office. He was a small man—Guthrie would have made two of him—and a bit awestruck, I could see, though holding himself with greater professional dignity because of that, as we made way for him and then crowded in behind.

He confirmed F. F.'s diagnosis by standing up quickly after kneeling only for a few seconds where F. F. had. Then he said hurriedly to the Governor, as if the words were being surprised out of him against his professional caution, "Mr. Usher, if I hadn't heard this man giving that great performance just now, I'd think he'd been dead for an hour or more."

He spoke low and not all of us heard him, but I did and so did Monica, and there was Shock Three to go along with the other two, raising in my mind for an instant the grisly picture of Guthrie Boyd's spirit, or some other entity, willing his dead body to go through with that last perform-

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ance. Once again I unsuccessfully tried to fumble together the parts of this night's mystery.

The little doctor looked around at us slowly and puzzledly. He said, "I take it he just wore the cloak over his street clothes?" He paused. Then, "He *did* play the Ghost?" he asked us.

The Governor and several others nodded, but some of us didn't at once and I think F. F. gave him a rather peculiar look, for the doctor cleared his throat and said, "I'll have to examine this man as quickly as possible in a better place and light. Is there—?" The Governor suggested the couch in his dressing room and the doctor designated Joe Rubens and John McCarthy and Francis Farley Scott to carry the body. He passed over the Governor, perhaps out of awe, but Hamlet helped just the same his black garb most fitting.

It was odd the doctor picked the older men—I think he did it for dignity. And it was odder still that he should have picked two ghosts to help carry a third, though he couldn't have known that.

As the designated ones moved forward, the doctor said, "Please stand back, the rest of you."

It was then that the very little thing happened which made all the pieces of this night's mystery fall into place—for me, that is, and for Monica too, judging from the way her hand trembled in and then tightened around mine. We'd been given the key to what had happened. I won't tell you what it was until I've knit together the ends of this story.

The second act was delayed perhaps a minute, but after that we kept to schedule, giving a better performance than usual—I never knew the Graveyard Scene to carry so much feeling, or the bit with Yorick's skull to be so poignant.

Just before I made my own first entrance, Joe Rubens snatched off my street hat—I'd had it on all this while—and I played all of Guildenstern wearing a wrist-watch, though I don't imagine anyone noticed.

F. F. played the Ghost as an offstage voice when he makes his final brief appearance in the Closet Scene. He used Guthrie's voice to do it, imitating him very well. It struck me afterwards as ghoulish—but right.

Well before the play ended, the doctor had decided he could say that Guthrie had died of a heart seizure, not mentioning the alcoholism. The minute the curtain came down on the last act, Harry Grossman informed Guthrie's son and daughter and brought them backstage. They were much moved, though hardly deeply smitten, seeing they'd been out of touch with the old boy for a decade. However, they quickly saw it was a Grand and Solemn Occasion and behaved accordingly, especial-

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ly Guthrie's pugnacious son-in-law.

Next morning the two Wolverton papers had headlines about it and Guthrie got his biggest notices ever in the Ghost. The strangeness of the event carried the item around the world—a six-line filler, capturing the mind for a second or two, about how a once-famous actor had died immediately after giving a performance as the Ghost in *Hamlet,* though in some versions, of course, it became Hamlet's Ghost.

The funeral came on the afternoon of the third day, just before our last performance in Wolverton, and the whole company attended along with Guthrie's children's crowd and many other Wolvertonians. Old Sybil broke down and sobbed.

Yet to be a bit callous, it was a neat thing that Guthrie died where he did, for it saved us the trouble of having to send for relatives and probably take care of the funeral ourselves. And it did give old Guthrie a grand finish, with everyone outside the company thinking him a hero-martyr to the motto The Show Must Go On. And of course we knew too that in a deeper sense he'd really been that.

We shifted around in our parts and doubled some to fill the little gaps Guthrie had left in the plays, so that the Governor didn't have to hire another actor at once. For me, and I think for Monica, the rest of the season was very sweet. Gertrude and Sybil carried on with the Ouija sessions alone.

And now I must tell you about the very little thing which gave myself and Monica a satisfying solution to the mystery of what had happened that night.

You'll have realized that it involved Props. Afterwards I asked him straight out about it and he shyly told me that he really couldn't help me there. He'd had this unaccountable devilish compulsion to get drunk and his mind had blanked out entirely from well before the performance until he found himself standing with F. F. over Guthrie's body at the end of the first act. He didn't remember the Ouija-scare or a word of what he'd said to me about theaters and time machines—or so he always insisted.

F. F. told us that after the Ghost's last exit he'd seen him—very vaguely in the dimness—lurch across backstage into the empty prop room and that he and Props had found Guthrie lying there at the end of the scene. I think the queer look F. F.—the old reality-fuddling rogue!—gave the doctor was to hint to him that *he* had played the Ghost, though that wasn't something I could ask him about.

But the very little thing— When they were picking up Guthrie's body and the doctor told the rest of us to stand back, Props turned

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as he obeyed and straightened his shoulders and looked direcly at Monica and myself, or rather a litle over our heads. He appeared compassionate yet smilingly serene as always and for a moment transfigured, as if he were the eternal observer of the stage of life and this little tragedy were only part of an infinitely vaster, endlessly interesting pattern.

I realized at that instant that Props could have done it, that he'd very effectively guarded the doorway to the empty prop room during our searches, that the Ghost's costume could be put on or off in seconds (though Props's shoulders wouldn't fill the cloak like Guthrie's), and that I'd never once before or during the play seen him and the Ghost at the same time. Yes, Guthrie had arrived a few minutes defore me . . . . and died . . . and Props, nerved to it by drink, had covered for him.

While Monica, as she told me later, knew at once that here was the great-browed face she'd glimpsed for a moment through the greenish gauze.

Clearly there had been four ghosts in *Hamlet* that night—John McCarthy, Francis Farley Scott, Guthrie Boyd, and the fourth who had really played the role. Mentally blacked out or not, knowing the lines from the many times he'd listened to *Hamlet* performed in this life, or from buried memories of times he'd taken the role in the days of Queen Elizabeth the First, Billy (or Willy) Simpson, or simply Willy S., had played the Ghost, a good trouper responding automatically to an emergency.

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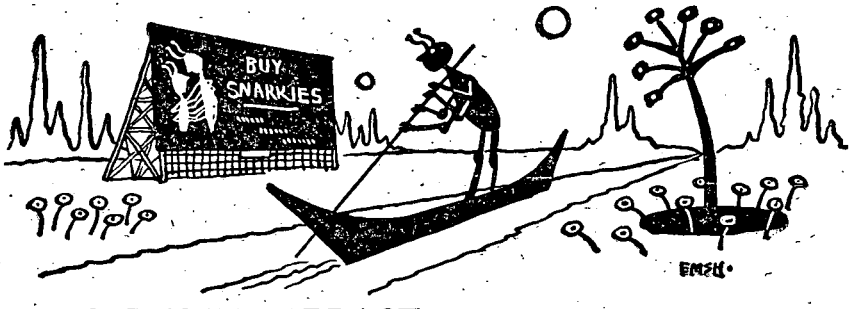

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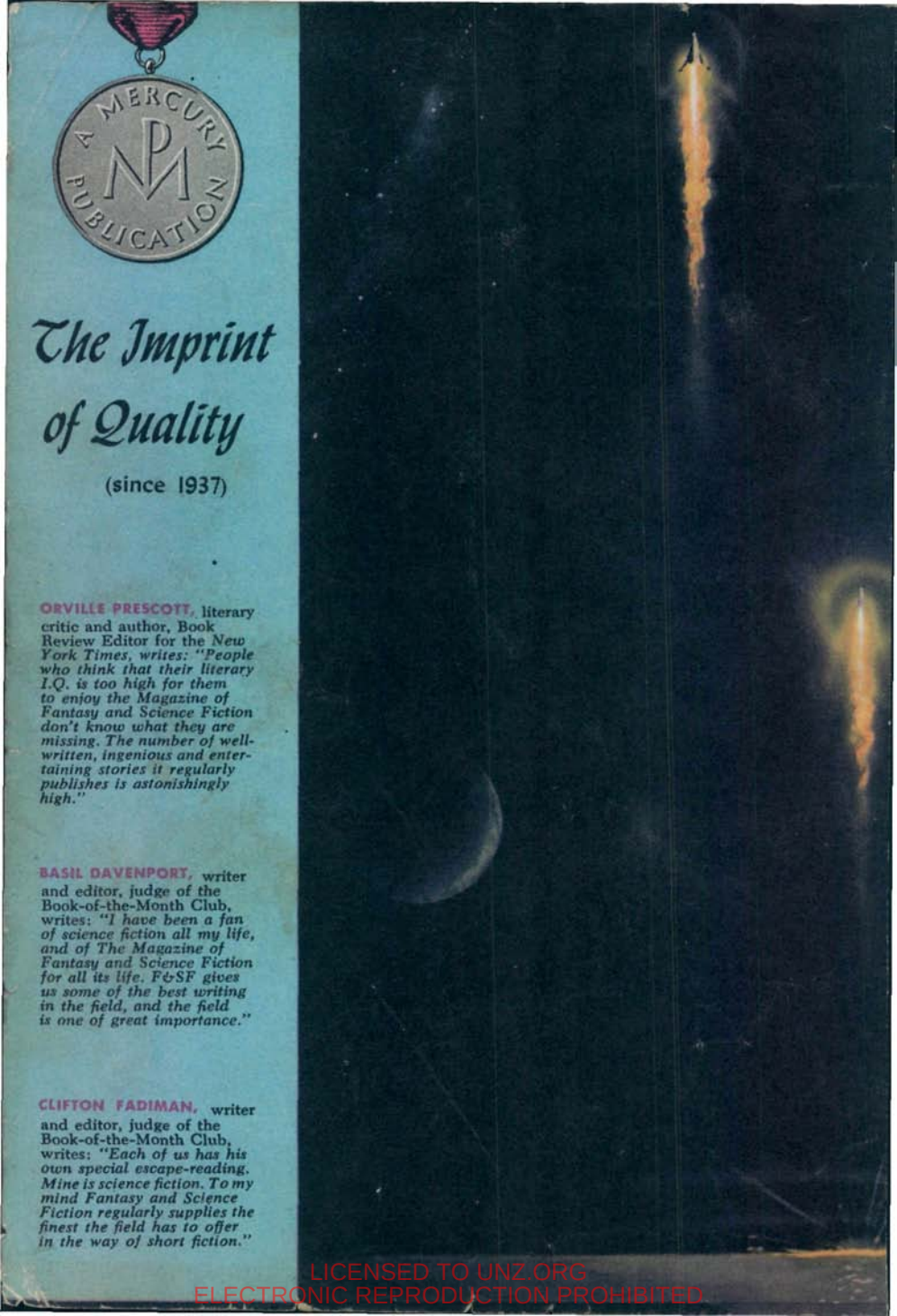
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